

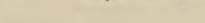




808  
FULCHER

(72526) **OCLC** F962f

Oklahoma City University  
Library



Presented by

DR. AND MRS. A.C. SCOTT

Dept. Due

**BOOK SALE**



---

FOUNDATIONS OF  
ENGLISH STYLE

---



# FOUNDATIONS OF ENGLISH STYLE

By

PAUL M. FULCHER

*Assistant Professor of English  
in the University of Wisconsin*

NO LONGER PROPERTY OF  
OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY  
*Oklahoma City University*  
LIBRARY  
*Library*

F. S. CROFTS & CO.

New York

1927

ESSAY INDEX

COPYRIGHT, 1927, BY F. S. CROFTS & CO., INC.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
BY THE VAIL-BALLOU PRESS, INC., BINGHAMTON, N. Y.

808  
F962f

72526

## PREFACE

The purpose of this small book of essays on and illustrative of English style is to present, in several different lights, the fundamental principles upon which all good writing in any language is based. Neither the editor nor the authors of the selections have any magic formula for success in writing. Still less have they any set of maxims, or catch-words for the quick and easy acquirement of graceful expression in from ten to thirty lessons. Nor is any attempt made to rival the larger and earlier collections of essays on style which admirably serve those who wish to make of the subject an exhaustive study.

It may be objected that the contents of this collection deal primarily with the writer and the quality of his mind rather than with the technique of his expression. That is an accurate statement of the editor's purpose. A style of value and beauty comes not merely from the avoidance of frequently listed errors, the observance of frequently proclaimed rules, but from a personality that is sincere, rich, powerful, and winsome,—from "Reason, tiptoe at the ultimate bound of her wit," from the man in whom

NO LONGER PROPERTY OF  
OKLAHOMA CITY UNIVERSITY

Oklahoma City University

Blood and brain and spirit, three  
Join in true felicity.

Style is not a garment to be slipped on that the bare and shivering idea may be warmed, or decorated, or padded out. It is an integral part of the pure, warm, living, naked body of the thought, bone of its bone, muscle of its muscle, heart of its heart. Style is organic. Whosoever touches it, touches a man.

A few examples of the varieties of English style, from the eccentrically beautiful and interesting to the style of easy and beautiful utility which has been our standard since Dryden, have been included for purposes of illustration. Teachers and students alike, however, are left free to supplement these largely by specimens of their own selection.

Thanks are due to those authors and publishers who have been kind enough to allow or arrange for the use of excerpts from their work. Individual acknowledgments are made after each selection.

## CONTENTS

### ESSAYS ON STYLE

		PAGE
The Seven Lamps of Style	<i>Paul M. Fulcher</i>	3
Truth of Intercourse	<i>Robert Louis Stevenson</i>	18
The Morality of the Profession of Letters	<i>Robert Louis Stevenson</i>	31
Style and Matter	<i>Thomas De Quincey</i>	42
Form and Substance	<i>Remy de Gourmont</i>	44
On Style	<i>Comte de Buffon</i>	47
The Sinews of Style	<i>Henry D. Thoreau</i>	50
Truth	<i>Walter Pater</i>	58
Sincerity	<i>George Henry Lewes</i>	64
Accuracy	<i>Samuel Taylor Coleridge</i>	96
Economy	<i>Herbert Spencer</i>	98
A Simple and an Ornate Style	<i>Thomas Sprat</i>	104
Simplicity	<i>George Henry Lewes</i>	108
Simplicity in Art	<i>Frank Norris</i>	112
Suggestion in Art	<i>John C. Van Dyke</i>	119
The Central Problem of Style	<i>John Middleton Murry</i>	122
Variety	<i>George Henry Lewes</i>	148
Hard Words	<i>Dean Swift</i>	152
On Jargon	<i>Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch</i>	155
Practical Hints	<i>Frederic Harrison</i>	174
Sound and Sense	<i>Guy N. Pocock</i>	180
Clay and Bronze	<i>Sidney Dobell</i>	188
“These but the Trappings . . .”	<i>Paul M. Fulcher</i>	189

*“A sentence should read as if its author, had he held a plough instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end.”*

—THOREAU.

*“To write well is to think deeply, feel vividly, and express clearly —to have intelligence, sensitiveness, and taste. Style supposes the united exercise of all the intellectual faculties. Ideas and ideas alone are its foundation.”*

—BUFFON.

## THE SEVEN LAMPS OF STYLE

**I**T is perhaps not too inappropriate in a discussion of style to adapt a title from Ruskin, especially if we agree, as Ruskin himself did about his Seven Lamps of Architecture, not to be over-insistent on the magic number, and admit that another might reduce our seven to five, or increase them to nine, and still have very much the same thing. For, just as to Ruskin architecture was something organic, integral, with its parts inseparable from the whole, with ideal and utility firmly woven together as warp and woof, so is style regarded by all those who practice it fittingly or admire it intelligently. In spite of Ruskin, of course, we still have our filling stations modeled on Greek temples, our Gothic peanut stands, our mission furniture decorating the headquarters of agnostic societies, our plaster columns which support nothing, and our ornamental vases which will not hold water. And in spite of our good writers and our critics, we still have our "inspirational" editorials, our "sob" stories, our campaign speeches, and our moving picture sub-titles. But even in this darkness the seven lamps of the kindred arts still blaze.

Let the first of our lamps to be considered be that of Sincerity. For most of us, it is not an easy thing to be sincere. We want to please; we fear disapprobation; or we have our own ends to forward at the expense of our honesty. "It is a dull thing to tire," said Bacon; but it is a dangerous thing to offend, and sincerity offends often. Yet for some of us sincerity is too easy a virtue. It has been said of Mr. H. G. Wells, who changes that highly interesting mind of his rather frequently, that he is always sincere, but that he finds it perilously easy to be so. Whatever may be the facts with Mr. Wells, the statement is true of many of us. We do not believe thoroughly enough in our own opinion to hold firmly to it until it is tenable no longer. Our loyalties are slippery. The easier they are gained and the less intellectual agony they cost us in the acquisition, the more readily do we relinquish them. And some of us go to the other extreme. An idea, an opinion, once achieved, can scarcely be dislodged; we feel as though we have gained the home port and will no longer be troubled by the waves of intellectual questionings. When the idea or the opinion has been demonstrated unworthy, has been riddled by merciless logic, until it is full of holes, we still cling to it and pretend not to see the damage that has been effected. Only a few, and these only part of the time, have the capacity to form and utter frank beliefs, to adhere to them faithfully, and

perhaps, at last, when the time has come to discard them, to throw them away cheerfully and openly for better ones.

Insincere writing is prevalent and dangerous. Words are sacred things; they should not be made to lie. Yet how often in editorials, in political speeches, in feature articles, in fiction, does the author brazenly set forth what he knows will please his readers and profit himself, without the slightest regard to the elemental consideration of honesty. The result is, eventually, a lessening of respect for the written word. Insincerity which is clumsy punishes itself by giving itself away. Clever insincerity, when it is at last discovered, reflects discredit on all writing by casting a doubt over the motives of the honest and the dishonest alike. Words, once more, are sacred things. "I have given my word" is sufficient guarantee between gentlemen. Let it have the same meaning of good faith between writer and reader when an utterance is confided to print.

But sincerity by itself is not enough. It is even dangerous if one is both sincere and mistaken. Sooner or later, the mere charlatan is discovered. It is the misguided sincere person who does the harm and accumulates the followers. His very sincerity serves as an apparently indisputable proof of his rightness. So another lamp is necessary, the lamp of Truth. "What is truth?" asked jesting Pilate, and would not stay

for an answer." So writes Bacon. By not staying, he missed, of course, the greatest opportunity to learn the nature of truth ever offered any man. Whatever truth may be, it is worth staying for. And it is the indispensable quality of anyone who wishes to write, who dares to write. Without it, writing can have no virtue whatsoever. Truth of some sort there must be—truth to fact, truth to the subject, truth to oneself, truth to our vision of the world and its meaning, truth to our imagination or our dreams. Some kind of truth there must be. It must include not merely literal accuracy, but wholeness, roundness, freedom from intentional or unintentional false suggestion; there must be no concealments, no glossing over of weak points in the fabric of the thought, no deceptive lights and shadows, and, last, no pretence at infallibility on the part of the author. Stevenson has written nobly on *Truth of Intercourse*. Let him who thinks absolute truth an easy task or a secondary virtue read that essay.

The third lamp is Courage. Its light is kindled from sincerity and truth, and without it, they are feeble and flickering things at best. To express an honest opinion of whatsoever kind requires high courage. When one is conscious that he is in the minority, that his opinion will be an unpopular one, the courage required is obvious. Equally courageous must be the man who expresses accepted and conven-

tional ideas, for the sophisticated critic will accuse him of being a bromide, a hack, a warmer over of morsels left half cold at earlier feasts of the soul. We need, says Dr. Johnson, not so much to be informed as to be reminded; and the person who reminds us, at the risk of being howled down by the worshippers of novelty, is brave indeed. Naturally, if we have no other reason for repeating things already known than the urge to see ourselves in print, we should refrain from writing at all. But if we feel the need of expressing again a well-known truth which we sincerely believe and which we have thought over long enough to have made our own, there is no occasion for a sneaking apology.

Clarity is the fourth lamp of style. Sincerity, truth, and courage are qualities that point inward. Clarity faces the other direction and furnishes the point of contact between writer and reader. In writing, where the tone of voice, the gesture, the possibility of further explanation, all the little aids to oral expression, are lacking, one must be constantly on one's guard against obscurity. Ambiguity of phrase, the wrong connotation of a single word, a critical or a technical term left undefined or used in an unfamiliar way—these and a dozen other lapses from clearness may be fatal to the smooth progress of thought from one mind to another. Thought is sometimes tough; the unfamiliar is puzzling, the abstract bewildering, to many. The

problem is a difficult one always. Wilful obscurity, with the intent that the writer may seem profound, is an unforgivable offence. Unintentional obscurity is self-punishing in that no contact is made with the reader's mind. The rhetoricians can catalog numerous devices that make for clearness. They may be summarized briefly: accuracy and intelligibility of word and phrase; proper relation between the parts of a sentence and proper sequence between sentences and in paragraphs; aptly chosen connectives; correct proportion; explanatory and illustrative concrete details. Remember that the reader may not know so much about the subject as the author knows; if he does, the author's writing at all is supererogatory. The reader cannot easily bridge the gaps which are unintentionally left between thoughts. He cannot fill in the explanations, supply the antecedent circumstances, which are taken for granted. Do not handicap him then. And do not dazzle him with the flash of your brilliance; be rather a lamp to his feet and a lantern to his path.

The fifth lamp is Power. The secret of power in writing is hard to discover, but its presence or its absence is always obviously to be noted and felt. Power cannot exist without sincerity, truth, courage, and clarity. But it demands even more than these. Its manifestations are numerous, but its effects are always the same—the consciousness that we have been

in the company of a mind worth knowing, and the urge to follow along in the path on which we have been started. Often we cannot decide just what is the source of the power we feel. Sometimes it is the down-right directness of the writing, a searching straightforwardness that compels us to listen, a driving force that seizes and holds us. That is true of such varied men as Bacon, Carlyle, and Thoreau. Sometimes it is a combination of imagination with an extreme accuracy of observation and expression; that was what attracted the old gentleman in *Cranford* to Tennyson and his cedar, with its "dark-green layers of shade"; what we admire Wordsworth for in his description of the hare at the opening of "Resolution and Independence." At times it is the beautiful and athletic economy of the author, as in work so widely separated in time and spirit as the poetry of Chaucer and the Gettysburg address of Lincoln. Again, it is the virility with which the style is marked that attracts and forms the source of its power, a high-hearted masculinity without, of course, the taint of the professional strong man with his imitation leopard-skin, famed in correspondence courses. Of such a real virility is the writing, in substance and expression, of the King James version of the Bible, of Matthew Arnold's criticism, of William James' essays on psychology and Bertrand Russell's on philosophy and the social order, of Roosevelt's historical essays at their best, of Whitman's

finest poetry, of the early short stories of Kipling, and of part of the work of Jack London. Or it may, finally, be something more than and including all of these—that hint of personality, as impossible to imitate as it is to mistake. Rooted in personality, indefinable, intangible, but incapable of being ignored, are the whimsical charm of Lamb, the ease of Hazlitt, the grace of Stevenson, the sonorous dignity of Burton and Browne, the majestic fire of Milton, the flashing, sometimes flashy glitter of Oscar Wilde, the silvery classic beauty of Gissing, the urbane gentleness of Dr. Samuel Crothers, the cultivated and faintly snobbish poise of Mrs. Katharine Fullerton Gerould, the perverse extravagances of G. K. Chesterton. Not all of these personalities may be to our liking, but there they are, and their power is undeniable.

The Scriptures inform us that no amount of taking thought can add a cubit to our stature, though the cheaper magazines carry advertisements of a new mechanical contrivance certified to increase our height to almost any desired degree, and accompanied by a picture of a very short gentleman being stretched while he sleeps, and presumably growing admirably overnight. And, though similar advertisements guarantee to add power to any man's writing, I doubt if either advertiser can fulfil his assertions. Power cannot be "added" to writing. It must be added first to the man himself; rather, it must grow as he grows.

A sixth lamp of style is Fitness. To Jonathan Swift, style consisted simply of proper words in proper places. That would seem easy, but it is not so easy as it seems. It is like Hamlet's directions to Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern about playing the recorder; unless one has the trick of it, no music comes. No, the definition is either too small, or so inclusive as to be useless. Yet fitness is certainly a cardinal virtue of style, fitness in the larger sense of the correspondence of tone to reader, purpose, and matter. One must know one's reader. Mr. Durant, writing the story of philosophy, adopts a tone which the teacher of a seminar in Kant or Plato would scarcely find suitable. The parables of the New Testament are so written as to have a universal appeal; yet their imagery must have found a quicker response in the oriental mind of twenty centuries ago than in our own, for it is based on the facts of oriental everyday life. Naturally, most writing has a more limited appeal than this, and is intended to reach a more or less restricted body of readers. That is the first consideration that the writer anxious about fitness should decide upon: whom is he writing for? Most poor writing sounds as if it were intended to be read in a vacuum similar to that from which it came. The second consideration in setting the tone is the kind of impression desired, the nature of the appeal to be made. If one wishes to reach the reason, the logical powers, emotion will play a very small

part; reason is a cold, clear light, a light without heat. If one wishes to move, it will not do to be fliprant, jocose. Charm will not be attained if coarseness or even brutal vigor is allowed a place. Dignity will disappear with the admission of slang and the too colloquial phrase. These warnings and their like become almost second nature to the writer who learns to play subtly on the delicate instrument of the reader's temperament. But let him go to work honestly. There should be no distortion of facts for effect, no attempt to whip up an interest already jaded by one's commonplaces. Plain thoughts, too, should go in plain garb, and all thoughts in garb that suits them. If your tune is Old Hundred, do not ask the reader to dance to it; do not ask him to make merry over the Dead March from Saul or the Sonata Pathétique. Above all, do not try to dupe him with your ingenious variations into mistaking a poor, thin melody for a better one. Your selection of a tone that will move the reader is the last consideration in this question of fitness, not the first. Before that must come knowledge of what the subject of its own nature will bear, and what it demands.

The last lamp in the series is that of Beauty. Without the others it is a flickering torch, a will-o'-the-wisp, a corpse-light shining over a graveyard of dead words unanimated by the soul of meaning. With the other six, it completes and makes perfect the whole.

Writing which lacks the element of beauty in some form or other must have qualities that are very high indeed if there is to be much hope for its survival.

Little of practical value can be said of beauty in style. It speaks for itself, but it gives no directions for its propagation. It resembles beauty of body. Real physical beauty is not a surface thing; it goes as deep as the body itself. So beauty of style is not a surface thing; it goes as deep as the thought itself, and finds its roots there. It is nourished on sincerity and truth, on courage, on clarity, on power, on fitness,—above all on truth and power. Just as remodeling the nose and de-cauliflowering the ears do not effect real beauty of person, so the removal of obvious infelicities of expression does not effect real beauty of style. You have it, or you have it not.

Three qualities of beauty in style may be said to have been isolated. They may even be cultivated after a fashion. Very careful must the writer be, however, lest he grow so deeply interested in their cultivation that he forget the primary aim of his writing. The three qualities are skilful variety in the sequence of parts, legitimate melody, and the employment of words and phrases with overtones.

A skilful variety, in phrasing, in the ordering of the parts of a sentence, and in the ordering of the sentences themselves, is a quality of beauty as easy to notice as it is hard to emulate. Rules for achiev-

ing it result only in machine-made eccentricity. Something depends on the variety inherent in the thought; something, too, on the author's vision, his ability to see diversity in oneness. It is often helpful to read aloud the best writers and observe their practice. But to the person who has no natural talent for profiting by such reading, little good will come of it; he might as profitably recite the telephone directory. Those naturally so gifted cannot help emulating, and emulating with a result that will be both original and personal.

Melody, or rhythm, in prose, is a much discussed subject, and a dangerous one. Some people are so engrossed by it that they lose interest in the more important tasks of a writer. Melody there is in all good prose, but we are tempted to say that it got there by the grace of God rather than by conscious effort. Stevenson comments at length on the alliteration in Shakspere's description of Cleopatra's barge. Most of the musical consonants in the passage Shakspere found ready to hand in North's Plutarch, his source. The rest were probably the instinctive promptings of a tuned and listening ear. To such a talent, rather than to rules and painstaking effort, do we owe most of the fine rhythms in our prose.

By words and phrases with overtones, I mean those which suggest more than they literally express. Sometimes the overtone depends on the context in which

the word or phrase is used—a fact which Matthew Arnold neglected to mention but which he surely must have meant to imply in the famous passage on “touchstones” of great poetry. Such a phrase, for instance, is the famous line near the end of Wordsworth’s “Michael”:

And never lifted up a single stone.

In their context, these seven simple words of our common speech have a poignancy unbelievable to one who has never read the poem. They convey the utter emptiness of Michael’s life, the sadness, haunting, eternal, and unconsoled, of a noble and afflicted old man. But out of their context they are nothing. Apply them to a lazy drunkard sentenced to thirty days of breaking rock on the highway, and suppose that he has somehow eluded the vigilance of his foreman, and they become ludicrous:

There in the shade he’d sit all day and groan,  
And never lifted up a single stone.

Truly, “proper words in proper places” has something to do with style. Sometimes, however, the phrase or the word has an overtone which accompanies it wherever it may be. Tear it out of its context, and it is still beautiful. “Felicity” is such a word. “Motherhood” and “fatherhood” are two others. “Eternity,” “immortal,” “evanescent,” “poignant,” “multitudinous,” “winsome,” “joy,” “for-

lorn"—the list might be extended for pages. Charming, seductive things are these our English words and their overtones; it is no wonder that many a writer has been lured into following them for their own sake. Used in cunning combinations, they offer even greater enchantment:

Give me the splendid silent sun . . .

Of old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago.

Mourns o'er the beauty of the Cyclades.

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd . . .

With what sad steps, O Moon, thou climb'st the sky . . .

Wisdom hath builded her an house . . .

And the long glories of the winter moon

Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn:

The same that oft-times hath  
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

O lyric love, half angel and half bird . . .

These, chosen simply as they occur to the memory, are among the thousand magic passages of our literature. Can you write a recipe for them?

These, then, are our seven lamps of style. You may know them by these names, or by others; it does not matter. But their combined glow must illuminate any piece of writing that is worthy of the name. They are not mere Christmas tree adornments, but sacred temple-flames, ever burning in the service of the human mind. They are fed, not by rules and subservience to handbooks, but by a devotion to the truth as one sees it, and a courageous determination to communicate that truth, clearly, powerfully, fittingly, and with whatever of beauty we can achieve.

“As to my style,” William Hazlitt wrote upon one occasion, “I thought little about it. I only used the word which seemed to me to signify the idea I wanted to convey, and I did not rest till I had got it. In seeking for truth I sometimes found beauty.”

## TRUTH OF INTERCOURSE

**A**MONG sayings that have a currency in spite of being wholly false upon the face of them for the sake of a half-truth upon another subject which is accidentally combined with the error, one of the grossest and broadest conveys the monstrous proposition that it is easy to tell the truth and hard to tell a lie. I wish heartily it were. But the truth is one; it has first to be discovered, then justly and exactly uttered. Even with instruments specially contrived for such a purpose—with a foot rule, a level, or a theodolite—it is not easy to be exact; it is easier, alas! to be inexact. From those who mark the divisions on a scale to those who measure the boundaries of empires or the distance of the heavenly stars, it is by careful method and minute, unwearying attention that men rise even to material exactness or to sure knowledge even of external and constant things. But it is easier to draw the outline of a mountain than the changing appearance of a face; and truth in human relations is of this more intangible and dubious order: hard to seize, harder to communicate. Veracity to facts in a loose, colloquial sense—not to say that I

have been in Malabar when as a matter of fact I was never out of England, not to say that I have read Cervantes in the original when as a matter of fact I know not one syllable of Spanish—this, indeed, is easy and to the same degree unimportant in itself. Lies of this sort, according to circumstances, may or may not be important; in a certain sense even they may or may not be false. The habitual liar may be a very honest fellow, and live truly with his wife and friends; while another man who never told a formal falsehood in his life may yet be himself one lie—heart and face, from top to bottom. This is the kind of lie which poisons intimacy. And, *vice versa*, veracity to sentiment, truth in a relation, truth to your own heart and your friends, never to feign or falsify emotion—that is the truth which makes love possible and mankind happy.

*L'art de bien dire* is but a drawing-room accomplishment unless it be pressed into the service of the truth. The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean; not to affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish. This is commonly understood in the case of books or set orations; even in making your will, or writing an explicit letter, some difficulty is admitted by the world. But one thing you can never make Philistine natures understand; one thing, which yet lies on the surface, remains as unseizable to their wits as a high flight of

metaphysics—namely, that the business of life is mainly carried on by means of this difficult art of literature, and according to a man's proficiency in that art shall be the freedom and the fulness of his intercourse with other men. Anybody, it is supposed, can say what he means; and, in spite of their notorious experience to the contrary, people so continue to suppose. Now, I simply open the last book I have been reading—Mr. Leland's captivating *English Gipsies*. "It is said," I find on p. 7, "that those who can converse with Irish peasants in their own native tongue form far higher opinions of their appreciation of the beautiful, and of the *elements of humour and pathos in their hearts*, than do those who know their thoughts only through the medium of English. I know from my own observations that this is quite the case with the Indians of North America, and it is unquestionably so with the gipsy." In short, where a man has not a full possession of the language, the most important, because the most amiable, qualities of his nature have to lie buried and fallow; for the pleasure of comradeship, and the intellectual part of love, rest upon these very "elements of humour and pathos." Here is a man opulent in both, and for lack of a medium he can put none of it out to interest in the market of affection! But what is thus made plain to our apprehensions in the case of a foreign language is partially true even with the tongue we learned in childhood. Indeed, we

all speak different dialects; one shall be copious and exact, another loose and meagre; but the speech of the ideal talker shall correspond and fit upon the truth of fact—not clumsily, obscuring lineaments, like a mantle, but cleanly adhering, like an athlete's skin. And what is the result? That the one can open himself more clearly to his friends, and can enjoy more of what makes life truly valuable—intimacy with those he loves. An orator makes a false step; he employs some trivial, some absurd, some vulgar phrase; in the turn of a sentence he insults, by a side wind, those whom he is labouring to charm; in speaking to one sentiment he unconsciously ruffles another in parenthesis; and you are not surprised, for you know his task to be delicate and filled with perils. "O frivolous mind of man, light ignorance!" As if yourself, when you seek to explain some misunderstanding or excuse some apparent fault, speaking swiftly and addressing a mind still recently incensed, were not harnessing for a more perilous adventure; as if yourself required less tact and eloquence; as if an angry friend or a suspicious lover were not more easy to offend than a meeting of indifferent politicians! Nay, and the orator treads in a beaten round; the matters he discusses have been discussed a thousand times before; language is ready-shaped to his purpose; he speaks out of a cut and dry vocabulary. But you—may it not be that your defence reposes on some

subtlety of feeling, not so much as touched upon in Shakespeare, to express which, like a pioneer, you must venture forth into zones of thought still un-surveyed, and become yourself a literary innovator? For even in love there are unlovely humours; ambiguous acts, unpardonable words, may yet have sprung from a kind sentiment. If the injured one could read your heart, you may be sure that he would understand and pardon; but, alas! the heart cannot be shown—it has to be demonstrated in words. Do you think it is a hard thing to write poetry? Why, that is to write poetry, and of a high, if not the highest, order.

I should even more admire “the lifelong and heroic literary labours” of my fellow-men, patiently clearing up in words their loves and their contentions, and speaking their autobiography daily to their wives, were it not for a circumstance which lessens their difficulty and my admiration by equal parts. For life, though largely, is not entirely carried on by literature. We are subject to physical passions and contortions; the voice breaks and changes, and speaks by unconscious and winning inflections; we have legible-countenances, like an open book; things that cannot be said look eloquently through the eyes; and the soul, not locked into the body as a dungeon, dwells ever on the threshold with appealing signals. Groans and tears, looks and gestures, a flush or a paleness, are

often the most clear reporters of the heart, and speak more directly to the hearts of others. The message flies by these interpreters in the least space of time, and the misunderstanding is averted in the moment of its birth. To explain in words takes time and a just and patient hearing; and in the critical epochs of a close relation, patience and justice are not qualities on which we can rely. But the look or the gesture explains things in a breath; they tell their message without ambiguity; unlike speech, they cannot stumble, by the way, on a reproach or an illusion that should steel your friend against the truth; and then they have a higher authority, for they are the direct expression of the heart, not yet transmitted through the unfaithful and sophisticating brain. Not long ago I wrote a letter to a friend which came near involving us in quarrel; but we met, and in personal talk I repeated the worst of what I had written, and added worse to that; and with the commentary of the body it seemed not unfriendly either to hear or say. Indeed, letters are in vain for the purposes of intimacy; an absence is a dead break in the relation; yet two who know each other fully and are bent on perpetuity in love, may so preserve the attitude of their affections that they may meet on the same terms as they had parted.

Pitiful is the case of the blind, who cannot read the face; pitiful that of the deaf, who cannot follow the

changes of the voice. And there are others also to be pitied; for there are some of an inert, uneloquent nature, who have been denied all the symbols of communication, who have neither a lively play of facial expression, nor speaking gestures, nor a responsive voice, nor yet the gift of frank, explanatory speech: people truly made of clay, people tied for life into a bag which no one can undo. They are poorer than the gipsy, for their heart can speak no language under heaven. Such people we must learn slowly by the tenor of their acts, or through yea and nay communications; or we take them on trust on the strength of a general air, and now and again, when we see the spirit breaking through in a flash, correct or change our estimate. But these will be uphill intimacies, without charm or freedom, to the end; and freedom is the chief ingredient in confidence. Some minds, romantically dull, despise physical endowments. That is a doctrine for a misanthrope; to those who like their fellow-creatures it must always be meaningless; and, for my part, I can see few things more desirable, after the possession of such radical qualities as honour and humour and pathos, than to have a lively and not a stolid countenance; to have looks to correspond with every feeling; to be elegant and delightful in person, so that we shall please even in the intervals of active pleasing, and may never discredit speech with uncouth manners or become unconsciously our own

burlesques. But of all unfortunates there is one creature (for I will not call him man) conspicuous in misfortune. This is he who has forfeited his birthright of expression, who has cultivated artful intonations, who has taught his face tricks, like a pet monkey, and on every side perverted or cut off his means of communication with his fellowmen. The body is a house of many windows: there we all sit, showing ourselves and crying on the passers-by to come and love us. But this fellow has filled his windows with opaque glass, elegantly coloured. His house may be admired for its design, the crowd may pause before the stained windows, but meanwhile the poor proprietor must lie languishing within, uncomforted, unchangeably alone.

Truth of intercourse is something more difficult than to refrain from open lies. It is possible to avoid falsehood and yet not tell the truth. It is not enough to answer formal questions. To reach the truth by *yea* and *nay* communications implies a questioner with a share of inspiration, such as is often found in mutual love. *Yea* and *nay* mean nothing; the meaning must have been related in the question. Many words are often necessary to convey a very simple statement; for in this sort of exercise we never hit the gold; the most that we can hope is by many arrows, more or less far off on different sides, to indicate, in the course of time, for what target we are aiming, and after an hour's talk, back and forward, to convey the purport

of a single principle or a single thought. And yet while the curt, pithy speaker misses the point entirely, a wordy, prolegomenous babbler will often add three new offences in the process of excusing one. It is really a most delicate affair. The world was made before the English language, and seemingly upon a different design. Suppose we held our converse not in words, but in music; those who have a bad ear would find themselves cut off from all near commerce, and no better than foreigners in this big world. But we do not consider how many have "a bad ear" for words, nor how often the most eloquent find nothing to reply. I hate questioners and questions; there are so few that can be spoken to without a lie. "*Do you forgive me?*" Madam and sweetheart, so far as I have gone in life I have never yet been able to discover what forgiveness means. "*Is it still the same between us?*" Why, how can it be? It is eternally different; and yet you are still the friend of my heart. "*Do you understand me?*" God knows; I should think it highly improbable.

The cruellest lies are often told in silence. A man may have sat in a room for hours and not opened his teeth, and yet come out of that room a disloyal friend or a vile calumniator. And how many loves have perished because, from pride, or spite, or diffidence, or that unmanly shame which withholds a man from daring to betray emotion, a lover, at the critical point of

the relation, has but hung his head and held his tongue? And, again, a lie may be told by a truth, or a truth conveyed through a lie. Truth to facts is not always truth to sentiment; and part of the truth, as often happens in answer to a question, may be the foulest calumny. A fact may be an exception; but the feeling is the law, and it is that which you must neither garble nor belie. The whole tenor of a conversation is a part of the meaning of each separate statement; the beginning and the end define and travesty the intermediate conversation. You never speak to God; you address a fellow-man, full of his own tempers; and to tell truth, rightly understood, is not to state the true facts, but to convey a true impression; truth in spirit, not truth to letter, is the true veracity. To reconcile averted friends a Jesuitical discretion is often needful, not so much to gain a kind hearing as to communicate sober truth. Women have an ill name in this connection; yet they live in as true relations; the lie of a good woman is the true index of her heart.

“It takes,” says Thoreau, in the noblest and most useful passage I remember to have read in any modern author, “two to speak truth—one to speak and another to hear.” He must be very little experienced, or have no great zeal for truth, who does not recognise the fact. A grain of anger or a grain of suspicion produces strange acoustical effects, and makes the ear

greedy to remark offence. Hence we find those who have once quarrelled carry themselves distantly, and are ever ready to break the truce. To speak truth there must be moral equality or else no respect; and hence between parent and child intercourse is apt to degenerate into a verbal fencing bout, and misapprehensions to become ingrained. And there is another side to this, for the parent begins with an imperfect notion of the child's character, formed in early years or during the equinoctial gales of youth; to this he adheres, noting only the facts which suit with his pre-conception; and wherever a person fancies himself unjustly judged, he at once and finally gives up the effort to speak truth. With our chosen friends, on the other hand, and still more between lovers (for mutual understanding is love's essence), the truth is easily indicated by the one and aptly comprehended by the other. A hint taken, a look understood, conveys the gist of long and delicate explanations; and where the life is known even *yea* and *nay* become luminous. In the closest of all relations—that of a love well founded and equally shared—speech is half discarded, like a roundabout, infantile process or a ceremony of formal etiquette; and the two communicate directly by their presences, and with few looks and fewer words contrive to share their good and evil and uphold each other's hearts in joy. For love rests upon a physical basis; it is a familiarity of nature's

making and apart from voluntary choice. Understanding has in some sort outrun knowledge, for the affection perhaps began with the acquaintance; and as it was not made like other relations, so it is not, like them, to be perturbed or clouded. Each knows more than can be uttered; each lives by faith, and believes by a natural compulsion; and between man and wife the language of the body is largely developed and grown strangely eloquent. The thought that prompted and was conveyed in a caress would only lose to be set down in words—ay, although Shakespeare himself should be the scribe.

Yet it is in these dear intimacies, beyond all others, that we must strive and do battle for the truth. Let but a doubt arise, and alas! all the previous intimacy and confidence is but another charge against the person doubted. *“What a monstrous dishonesty is this if I have been deceived so long and so completely!”* Let but that thought gain entrance, and you plead before a deaf tribunal. Appeal to the past; why, that is your crime! Make all clear, convince the reason; alas! speciousness is but a proof against you. *“If you can abuse me now, the more likely that you have abused me from the first.”*

For a strong affection such moments are worth supporting, and they will end well; for your advocate is in your lover's heart, and speaks her own language; it is not you but she herself who can defend and clear

you of the charge. But in slighter intimacies, and for a less stringent union? Indeed, is it worth while? We are all *incompris*, only more or less concerned for the mischance; all trying wrongly to do right; all fawning at each other's feet like dumb, neglected lap-dogs. Sometimes we catch an eye—this is our opportunity in the ages—and we wag our tail with a poor smile. "*Is that all?*" All? If you only knew! But how can they know? They do not love us; the more fools we to squander life on the indifferent.

But the morality of the thing, you will be glad to hear, is excellent; for it is only by trying to understand others that we can get our own hearts understood; and in matters of human feeling the clement judge is the most successful pleader.

R. L. STEVENSON: *Virginibus Puerisque*. Used by permission of and arrangement with the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

## THE MORALITY OF THE PROFESSION OF LETTERS

**T**HERE are two duties incumbent upon any man who enters on the business of writing: truth to the fact and a good spirit in the treatment. In every department of literature, though so low as hardly to deserve the name, truth to the fact is of importance to the education and comfort of mankind, and so hard to preserve, that the faithful trying to do so will lend some dignity to the man who tries it. Our judgments are based upon two things: first, upon the original preferences of our soul; but, second, upon the mass of testimony to the nature of God, man, and the universe which reaches us, in divers manners, from without. For the most part these divers manners are reducible to one, all that we learn of past times and much that we learn of our own reaching us through the medium of books or papers, and even he who cannot read learning from the same source at second-hand and by the report of him who can. Thus the sum of the contemporary knowledge or ignorance of good and evil is, in large measure, the handiwork of those who write. Those who write have to see that

each man's knowledge is, as near as they can make it, answerable to the facts of life; that he shall not suppose himself an angel or a monster; nor take this world for a hell; nor be suffered to imagine that all rights are concentrated in his own caste or country, or all veracities in his own parochial creed. Each man should learn what is within him, that he may strive to mend; he must be taught what is without him, that he may be kind to others. It can never be wrong to tell him the truth; for, in his disputable state, weaving as he goes his theory of life, steering himself, cheering or reproving others, all facts are of the first importance to his conduct; and even if a fact shall discourage or corrupt him, it is still best that he should know it; for it is in this world as it is, and not in a world made easy by educational suppressions, that he must win his way to shame or glory. In one word, it must always be foul to tell what is false; and it can never be safe to suppress what is true. The very fact that you omit may be the fact which somebody was wanting, for one man's meat is another man's poison, and I have known a person who was cheered by the perusal of *Candide*. Every fact is a part of that great puzzle we must set together; and none that comes directly in a writer's path but has some nice relations, unperceivable by him, to the totality and bearing of the subject under hand. Yet there are certain classes of fact eternally more necessary than

others, and it is with these that literature must first bestir itself. They are not hard to distinguish, nature once more easily leading us; for the necessary, because the efficacious, facts are those which are most interesting to the natural mind of man. Those which are coloured, picturesque, human, and rooted in morality, and those, on the other hand, which are clear, indisputable, and a part of science, are alone vital in importance, seizing by their interest, or useful to communicate. So far as the writer merely narrates, he should principally tell of these. He should tell of the kind and wholesome and beautiful elements of our life; he should tell unsparingly of the evil and sorrow of the present, to move us with instances; he should tell of wise and good people in the past, to excite us by example; and of these he should tell soberly and truthfully, not glossing faults, that we may neither grow discouraged with ourselves nor exacting to our neighbours. So the body of contemporary literature, ephemeral and feeble in itself, touches in the minds of men the springs of thought and kindness, and supports them (for those who will go at all are easily supported) on their way to what is true and right. And if, in any degree, it does so now, how much more might it do so if the writers chose! There is not a life in all the records of the past but, properly studied, might lend a hint and a help to some contemporary. There is not a juncture

in to-day's affairs but some useful word may yet be said of it. Even the reporter has an office, and, with clear eyes and honest language, may unveil injustices and point the way to progress. And for a last word: in all narration there is only one way to be clever, and that is to be exact. To be vivid is a secondary quality which must presuppose the first; for vividly to convey a wrong impression is only to make failure conspicuous.

But a fact may be viewed on many sides; it may be chronicled with rage, tears, laughter, indifference, or admiration, and by each of these the story will be transformed to something else. The newspapers that told of the return of our representatives from Berlin, even if they had not differed as to the facts, would have sufficiently differed by their spirits; so that the one description would have been a second ovation, and the other a prolonged insult. The subject makes but a trifling part of any piece of literature, and the view of the writer is itself a fact more important because less disputable than the others. Now this spirit in which a subject is regarded, important in all kinds of literary work, becomes all-important in works of fiction, meditation, or rhapsody; for there it not only colours but itself chooses the facts; not only modifies but shapes the work. And hence, over the far larger proportion of the field of literature, the health or disease of the writer's mind or momentary humour

forms not only the leading feature of his work, but is, at bottom, the only thing he can communicate to others. In all works of art, widely speaking, it is first of all the author's attitude that is narrated, though in the attitude there be implied a whole experience and a theory of life. An author who has begged the question and reposes in some narrow faith cannot, if he would, express the whole or even many of the sides of his various existence; for, his own life being maim, some of them are not admitted in his theory, and were only dimly and unwillingly recognised in his experience. Hence the smallness, the triteness, and the inhumanity in works of merely sectarian religion; and hence we find equal although unsimilar limitation in works inspired by the spirit of the flesh or the despicable taste for high society. So that the first duty of any man who is to write is intellectual. Designedly or not, he has so far set himself up for a leader of the minds of men; and he must see that his own mind is kept supple, charitable, and bright. Everything but prejudice should find a voice through him; he should see the good in all things; where he has even a fear that he does not wholly understand, there he should be wholly silent; and he should recognise from the first that he has only one tool in his workshop, and that tool is sympathy.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A footnote, at least, is due to the admirable example set before all young writers in the width of literary sympathy

The second duty, far harder to define, is moral. There are a thousand different humours in the mind, and about each of them, when it is uppermost, some literature tends to be deposited. Is this to be allowed? Not certainly in every case, and yet perhaps in more than rigourists would fancy. It were to be desired that all literary work, and chiefly works of art, issued from sound, human, healthy, and potent impulses, whether grave or laughing, humorous, romantic, or religious. Yet it cannot be denied that some valuable books are partially insane; some, mostly religious, partially inhuman; and very many tainted with morbidity and impotence. We do not loathe a masterpiece although we gird against its blemishes. We are not, above all, to look for faults, but merits. There is no book perfect, even in design; but there are many that will delight, improve, or encourage the reader. On the one hand, the Hebrew psalms are the only religious poetry on earth; yet they contain sallies that savour rankly of the man of blood. On the other hand, Alfred de Musset had a poisoned and a contorted nature; I am only quoting that generous and frivolous giant, old Dumas, when I accuse him

displayed by Mr. Swinburne. He runs forth to welcome merit, whether in Dickens or Trollope, whether in Villon, Milton, or Pope. This is, in criticism, the attitude we should all seek to preserve, not only in that, but in every branch of literary work.

of a bad heart; yet, when the impulse under which he wrote was purely creative, he could give us works like *Sarmosine* or *Fantasio*, in which the last note of the romantic comedy seems to have been found again to touch and please us. When Flaubert wrote *Madame Bovary*, I believe he thought chiefly of a somewhat morbid realism; and behold! the book turned in his hands into a masterpiece of appalling morality. But the truth is, when books are conceived under a great stress, with a soul of ninefold power, nine times heated and electrified by effort, the conditions of our being are seized with such an ample grasp, that, even should the main design be trivial or base, some truth and beauty cannot fail to be expressed. Out of the strong comes forth sweetness; but an ill thing poorly done is an ill thing top and bottom. And so this can be no encouragement to knock-kneed, feeble-wristed scribes, who must take their business conscientiously or be ashamed to practise it.

Man is imperfect; yet, in his literature, he must express himself and his own views and preferences; for to do anything else is to do a far more perilous thing than to risk being immoral: it is to be sure of being untrue. To ape a sentiment, even a good one, is to travesty a sentiment; that will not be helpful. To conceal a sentiment, if you are sure you hold it, is to take a liberty with truth. There is probably no point

of view possible to a sane man but contains some truth and, in the true connection, might be profitable to the race. I am not afraid of the truth, if any one could tell it me, but I am afraid of parts of it impertinently uttered. There is a time to dance and a time to mourn; to be harsh as well as to be sentimental; to be ascetic as well as to glorify the appetites; and if a man were to combine all these extremes into his work, each in its place and proportion, that work would be the world's masterpiece of morality as well as of art. Partiality is immortality; for any book is wrong that gives a misleading picture of the world and life. The trouble is that the weakling must be partial; the work of one proving dank and depressing; of another, cheap and vulgar; of a third, epileptically sensual; of a fourth, sourly ascetic. In literature as in conduct, you can never hope to do exactly right. All you can do is to make as sure as possible; and for that there is but one rule. Nothing should be done in a hurry that can be done slowly. It is no use to write a book and put it by for nine or even ninety years; for in the writing you will have partly convinced yourself; the delay must precede any beginning; and if you meditate a work of art, you should first long roll the subject under the tongue to make sure you like the flavour, before you brew a volume that shall taste of it from end to end; or if

you propose to enter on the field of controversy, you should first have thought upon the question under all conditions, in health as well as in sickness, in sorrow as well as in joy. It is this nearness of examination necessary for any true and kind writing, that makes the practice of the art a prolonged and noble education of the writer.

There is plenty to do, plenty to say, or to say over again, in the meantime. Any literary work which conveys faithful facts or pleasing impressions is a service to the public. It is even a service to be thankfully proud of having rendered. The slightest novels are a blessing to those in distress, not chloroform itself a greater. Our fine old sea-captain's life was justified when Carlyle soothed his mind with *The King's Own* or *Newton Forster*. To please is to serve; and so far from its being difficult to instruct while you amuse, it is difficult to do the one thoroughly without the other. Some part of the writer or his life will crop out in even a vapid book; and to read a novel that was conceived with any force is to multiply experience and to exercise the sympathies. Every article, every piece of verse, every essay, every *entre-filet*, is destined to pass, however swiftly, through the minds of some portion of the public, and to colour, however transiently, their thoughts. When any subject falls to be discussed, some scribbler on a paper has the in-

valuable opportunity of beginning its discussion in a dignified and human spirit; and if there were enough who did so in our public press, neither the public nor the Parliament would find it in their minds to drop to meaner thoughts. The writer has the chance to stumble, by the way, on something pleasing, something interesting, something encouraging, were it only to a single reader. He will be unfortunate, indeed, if he suit no one. He has the chance, besides, to stumble on something that a dull person shall be able to comprehend; and for a dull person to have read anything and, for that once, comprehended it, makes a marking epoch in his education.

Here, then, is work worth doing and worth trying to do well. And so, if I were minded to welcome any great accession to our trade, it should not be from any reason of a higher wage, but because it was a trade which was useful in a very great and in a very high degree; which every honest tradesman could make more serviceable to mankind in his single strength; which was difficult to do well and possible to do better every year; which called for scrupulous thought on the part of all who practised it, and hence became a perpetual education to their nobler natures; and which, pay it as you please, in the large majority of the best cases will still be underpaid. For surely, at this time of day in the nineteenth century, there is

nothing that an honest man should fear more timidously than getting and spending more than he deserves.

R. L. STEVENSON: "The Morality of the Profession of Letters." In *Essays on Literature*. Used by permission of, and arrangement with, the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

## STYLE AND MATTER

WHATSOEVER is entirely independent of the mind, and external to it, is generally equal to its own enunciation. Ponderable facts and external realities are intelligible in almost any language: they are self-explained and self-sustained. But, the more closely any exercise of mind is connected with what is internal and individual in the sensibilities,—that is, with what is philosophically termed *subjective*,—precisely in that degree, and the more subtly, does the style or the embodying of the thoughts cease to be a mere separable ornament, and in fact the more does the manner, as we expressed it before, become confluent with the matter. In saying this, we do but vary the form of what we once heard delivered on this subject by Mr. Wordsworth. His remark was by far the weightiest thing we ever heard on the subject of style; and it was this: that it is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction “the *dress* of thoughts.” And what was it then that he would substitute? Why this: he would call it “the *incarnation* of thoughts.” Never in one word was so profound a truth conveyed. Mr. Wordsworth was thinking, doubtless, of poetry like his own: viz.

that which is eminently meditative. And the truth is apparent on consideration: for, if language were merely a dress, then you could separate the two; you could lay the thoughts on the left hand, the language on the right. But, generally speaking, you can no more deal thus with poetic thoughts than you can with soul and body. The union is too subtle, the intertexture too ineffable,—each coexisting not merely *with* the other, but each *in* and *through* the other. An image, for instance, a single word, often enters into a thought as a constituent part. In short, the two elements are not united as a body with a separate dress, but as a mysterious incarnation. And thus, in what proportion the thoughts are subjective, in that same proportion does the very essence become identical with the expression, and the style become confluent with the matter.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY: *Style.*

## FORM AND SUBSTANCE

**I**N literature, the foundation of things has an absolute importance. No kind of literature can escape the need of sinking its foundations deep and building them strong. Sometimes a poet may be granted the right to make something out of nothing—but there are nothings and nothings. The nuances of love are nothings; yet, like everything that touches the transmission of life, they have an inestimable importance. Always and inevitably it is the foundation that counts. New facts, new ideas, are of more value than fine phrases. A lovely phrase is a lovely thing, and so is a lovely flower. But they are almost equally short-lived —a day, a century. Nothing perishes more quickly than a style which is not based on solid, vigorous thought. It shrivels like a stretched skin, falls in a heap like ivy from the decayed tree that once supported it. If you answer that the ivy may keep a tree with dried-out roots from falling, I agree. Style has its strength, too. But its worth decreases with a rapidity proportionate to its weakening from trying to preserve from ruin the fragile thing it clings to and supports.

To distinguish between form and substance is probably a mistake. It suggests the scholastic reasoning of St. Thomas Aquinas on the union of soul and body. St. Thomas easily demonstrated that form is a function of the soul and that, before or after the coming or the passing of the soul, the embryo and the corpse could have only illusory forms. Such distinctions are valid no longer. Amorphous matter does not exist. Thoughts have their boundaries and hence their shapes, since they are only imperfect representations of actual or potential, real or imaginary, life. Substance produces form just as the tortoise or the oyster does the material of his shell.

As soon as they took the trouble to write, nearly all the great scientists have been perfect writers. Necessarily theirs is a visual imagination. They describe what is seen or will be seen; hence their speech produces images. In this sense even the mathematician, the geometrician, and the chess-player are seers. Linné, Galileo, Leibnitz, Lavoisier, Lamarck, Gauss, Claude Bernard, and Pasteur write with a sure and vigorous touch. Goethe's literary genius is not less in his scientific work than in his poems.

Form without foundation, style without thought—what poor things they are! . . . The contrast between the smooth and shining beauty of the dress and the skeleton that it clothes is pathetic, like a graveyard covered with flowers. The worth of the style is

exactly equal to the worth of the thought. That is the central truth. . . .

If no literary work lives except by its style, that is due to the fact that works well-conceived are invariably well-written. But the opposite is not true. By itself, style is nothing. It will even come to pass—for in art as in love everything is possible—that style, which gives some works temporary life, will cause untimely death to others. *Cymodocea* suffocated beneath her too rich and heavy robe.

In any work of the mind, the thought is the mark of the man. The thought *is* the man. Style and thought are one.

REMY DE GOURMONT: *Le problème du Style*. Freely translated by the editor.

## ON STYLE

STYLE is simply the order and movement a man gives to his thoughts. If one joins his thoughts compactly, presses them together, the style will be solid, vigorous, and terse; if he lets their sequence be leisurely and at the suggestion of the words, however fine these may be, the style will be diffuse, formless, and sluggish.

But the writer, before searching for the order in which to present his thoughts, must look to another more general and more rigid order involving only large views and fundamental ideas. By fixing their places in this preliminary plan he limits the subject and learns its extent. By keeping these first boundaries constantly in mind he will determine the exact intervals which separate his main ideas and will develop those accessory and intermediary ones which fill out the original conception. . . .

Why are the works of Nature so faultless? Because each is a unit, because Nature works by a plan from which she never deviates, silently preparing the germs of her production, sketching in a single act the original form of every living thing, developing it, perfecting it, by one continuous movement and in a

prescribed time. The human intellect can create nothing; only after it has been fertilized by experience and meditation can it produce; its acquisitions are the germs of its productions. But if it models itself on Nature in its process and its work, if it lifts itself by study to the highest truths, synthesizing them, binding them together, by reflection forming from them a systematic whole, it shall establish on an unshakable base that which shall prove everlasting.

From lack of plan, lack of consideration of purpose, even an intelligent man finds himself embarrassed and does not know where to begin writing. He sees all at once a great number of ideas; and, since he has not compared or subordinated them, cannot choose among them and remains perplexed. But when he has made a plan, brought together and arranged all the essential thoughts, he will easily see the instant when he ought to take up his pen, will feel sure that his mind is ready to create, will be moved to give utterance to his ideas, and will find only pleasure in writing. His ideas will follow one another readily; . . . objects will take on color . . . and the style will grow interesting and luminous. . . .

To write well, then, one must be completely master of the subject. One must think about it long enough to see clearly the order of the thoughts, to arrange them in a sequence, a continuous chain, each part of which stands for an idea. And, when one has begun

to write, one must follow this plan, without digression, without disproportionate dwelling on any point, without developing any other movement save that demanded by the space to be traversed. It is exactly this that constitutes severity in style, that makes for unity, and that governs the rapidity of the movement. It is this alone that will make a style exact and simple, even and clear, vivid and coherent. If to this rule . . . one join judgment and taste, care in the choice of diction, . . . the style will have elevation. If, in addition, one add a suspicion of his first inspiration, a scorn for what is merely brilliant, and an unwavering dislike for the equivocal and the eccentric, the style will even be grave and majestic. In short, if one writes as he thinks, is himself convinced of what he wishes to impart to others, this self-respect, which makes for respect towards others and truth of style, will enable him to produce the whole effect he intends, provided that this self-confidence is not too enthusiastically reflected and that there is everywhere more frankness than cocksureness, more light than heat.

COMTE DE BUFFON: *Discourse on Style*. Freely translated by the editor.

## THE SINEWS OF STYLE

ENOUGH has been said in these days of the charm of fluent writing. We hear it complained of some works of genius that they have fine thoughts, but are irregular and have no flow. But even the mountain peaks in the horizon are, to the eye of science, parts of one range. We should consider that the flow of thought is more like a tidal wave than a prone river, and is the result of a celestial influence, not of any declivity in its channel. The river flows because it runs down hill, and flows the faster, the faster it descends. The reader who expects to float downstream for the whole voyage may well complain of nauseating swells and choppings of the sea when his frail shore craft gets amidst the billows of the ocean stream, which flows as much to sun and moon as lesser streams to it. But if we would appreciate the flow that is in these books, we must expect to feel it rise from the page like an exhalation, and wash away our critical brains like burr millstones, flowing to higher levels above and behind ourselves. There is many a book which ripples on like a freshet, and flows as glibly as a mill-stream sucking under a

causeway; and when their authors are in the full tide of their discourse, Pythagoras and Plato and Jamblichus halt beside them. Their long, stringy, slimy sentences are of that consistency that they naturally flow and run together. They read as if written for military men, for men of business, there is such a dispatch in them. Compared with these, the grave thinkers and philosophers seem not to have got their swaddling-clothes off; they are slower than a Roman army in its march, the rear camping to-night where the van camped last night. The wise Jamblichus eddies and gleams like a watery slough.

How many thousands never heard the name  
Of Sidney, or of Spenser, or their books!  
And yet brave fellows, and presume of fame,  
And seem to bear down all the world with looks!

The ready writer seizes the pen and shouts “Forward! Alamo and Fanning!” and after rolls the tide of war. The very walls and fences seem to travel. But the most rapid trot is no flow after all; and thither, reader, you and I, at least, will not follow.

A perfectly healthy sentence, it is true, is extremely rare. For the most part we miss the hue and fragrance of the thought; as if we could be satisfied with the dews of the morning or evening without their colors, or the heavens without their azure. The most attractive sentences are, perhaps, not the wisest, but the

surest and roundest. They are spoken firmly and conclusively, as if the speaker had a right to know what he says, and if not wise, they have at least been well learned. Sir Walter Raleigh might well be studied, if only for the excellence of his style, for he is remarkable in the midst of so many masters. There is a natural emphasis in his style, like a man's tread, and a breathing space between the sentences, which the best of modern writing does not furnish. His chapters are like English parks, or say rather like a Western forest, where the larger growth keeps down the underwood, and one may ride on horse-back through the openings. All the distinguished writers of that period possess a greater vigor and naturalness than the more modern,—for it is allowed to slander our own time,—and when we read a quotation from one of them in the midst of a modern author, we seem to have come suddenly upon a greener ground, a greater depth and strength of soil. It is as if a green bough were laid across the page, and we are refreshed as by the sight of fresh grass in midwinter or early spring. You have constantly the warrant of life and experience in what you read. The little that is said is eked out by implication of the much that was done. The sentences are verdurous and blooming as evergreen and flowers, because they are rooted in fact and experience, but our false and florid sentences have only the tints of flowers without their sap or

roots. All men are really most attracted by the beauty of plain speech, and they even write in a florid style in imitation of this. They prefer to be misunderstood rather than to come short of its exuberance. Hussein Effendi praised the epistolary style of Ibrahim Pasha to the French traveler Botta, because of "the difficulty of understanding it; there was," he said, "but one person at Jidda who was capable of understanding and explaining the Pasha's correspondence." A man's whole life is taxed for the least thing well done. It is its net result. Every sentence is the result of a long probation. Where shall we look for standard English but to the words of a standard man? The word which is best said came nearest to not being spoken at all, for it is cousin to a deed which the speaker could have better done. Nay, almost it must have taken the place of a deed by some urgent necessity, even by some misfortune, so that the truest writer will be some captive knight, after all. And perhaps the fates had such a design, when, having stored Raleigh so richly with the substance of life and experience, they made him a fast prisoner, and compelled him to make his words his deeds, and transfer to his expression the emphasis and sincerity of his action.

Men have a respect for scholarship and learning greatly out of proportion to the use they commonly serve. We are amused to read how Ben Jonson engaged that the dull masks with which the royal fam-

ily and nobility were to be entertained should be "grounded upon antiquity and solid learning." Can there be any greater reproach than an idle learning? Learn to split wood, at least. The necessity of labor and conversation with many men and things, to the scholar is rarely well remembered; steady labor with the hands, which engrosses the attention also, is unquestionably the best method of removing palaver and sentimentality out of one's style, both of speaking and writing. If he has worked hard from morning till night, though he may have grieved that he could not be watching the train of his thoughts during that time, yet the few hasty lines which at evening record his day's experience will be more musical and true than his freest but idle fancy could have furnished. Surely the writer is to address a world of laborers, and such therefore must be his own discipline. He will not idly dance at his work who has wood to cut and cord before nightfall in the short days of winter; but every stroke will be husbanded, and ring soberly through the wood; and so will the strokes of that scholar's pen, which at evening record the story of the day, ring soberly, yet cheerily, on the ear of the reader, long after the echoes of his axe have died away. The scholar may be sure that he writes the tougher truth for the calluses on his palms. They give firmness to the sentence. Indeed, the mind never makes a great and successful effort, without

a corresponding energy of the body. We are often struck by the force and precision of style to which hard-working men, unpracticed in writing, easily attain when required to make the effort. As if plainness and vigor and sincerity, the ornaments of style, were better learned on the farm and in the workshop than in the schools. The sentences written by such rude hands are nervous and tough, like hardened thongs, the sinews of the deer, or the roots of the pine. As for the graces of expression, a great thought is never found in a mean dress; but though it proceed from the lips of the Wolofs, the nine Muses and the three Graces will have conspired to clothe it in fit phrase. Its education has always been liberal, and its implied wit can endow a college. The world, which the Greeks called Beauty, has been made such by being gradually divested of every ornament which was not fitted to endure. The Sibyl, "speaking with inspired mouth, smileless, inornate, and unperfumed, pierces through centuries by the power of the god." The scholar might frequently emulate the propriety and emphasis of the farmer's call to his team, and confess that if that were written it would surpass his labored sentences. Whose are the truly *labored* sentences? From the weak and flimsy periods of the politician and literary man, we are glad to turn even to the description of work, the simple record of the month's labor in the farmer's almanac, to restore our tone and

spirits. A sentence should read as if its author, had he held a plough instead of a pen, could have drawn a furrow deep and straight to the end. The scholar requires hard and serious labor to give an impetus to his thought. He will learn to grasp the pen firmly so, and wield it gracefully and effectively, as an axe or a sword. When we consider the weak and nerveless periods of some literary men, who perchance in feet and inches come up to the standard of their race, and are not deficient in girth also, we are amazed at the immense sacrifice of thews and sinews. What! these proportions,—these bones,—and this their work! Hands which could have felled an ox have hewed this fragile matter which would not have task'd a lady's fingers! Can this be a stalwart man's work, who has a marrow in his back and a tendon Achilles in his heel? They who set up the blocks of Stonehenge did somewhat, if they only laid out their strength for once, and stretched themselves.

Yet, after all, the truly efficient laborer will not crowd his day with work, but will saunter to his task, surrounded by a wide halo of ease and leisure, and then do but what he loves best. He is anxious only about the fruitful kernels of time. Though the hen should sit all day, she could lay only one egg, and, besides, would not have picked up materials for another. Let a man take time enough for the most trivial deed, though it be but the paring of his nails.

The buds swell imperceptibly, without hurry or confusion, as if the short spring days were an eternity.

Then spend an age in whetting thy desire,  
Thou need'st not *hasten* if thou dost *stand fast*.

Some hours seem not to be occasion for any deed, but for resolves to draw breath in. We do not directly go about the execution of the purpose that thrills us, but shut our doors behind us and ramble with prepared mind, as if the half were already done. Our resolution is taking root or hold on the earth then, as seeds first send a shoot downward which is fed by their own albumen, ere they send one upward to the light.

H. D. THOREAU: *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*  
Used by permission of and arrangement with Houghton Mifflin Company, the authorized publishers.

## TRUTH

**I**N the highest as in the lowliest literature, then, the one indispensable beauty is, after all, truth:—truth to bare fact in the latter, as to some personal sense of fact, diverted somewhat from men's ordinary sense of it, in the former; truth there as accuracy, truth here as expression, that finest and most intimate form of truth, the *vraie vérité*. And what an eclectic principle this really is! employing for its one sole purpose—that absolute accordance of expression to idea—all other literary beauties and excellences whatever: how many kinds of style it covers, explains, justifies, and at the same time safeguards! Scott's facility, Flaubert's deeply pondered evocation of “the phrase,” are equally good art. Say what you have to say, what you have a will to say, in the simplest, the most direct and exact manner possible, with no surplusage:—there, is the justification of the sentence so fortunately born, “entire, smooth, and round,” that it needs no punctuation, and also (that is the point!) of the most elaborate period, if it be right in its elaboration. Here is the office of ornament: here also the purpose of restraint in ornament. As the exponent of

truth, that austerity (the beauty, the function, of which in literature Flaubert understood so well) becomes not the correctness or purism of the mere scholar, but a security against the otiose, a jealous exclusion of what does not really tell towards the pursuit of relief, of life and vigor in the portraiture of one's sense. License again, the making free with rule, if it be indeed, as people fancy, a habit of genius, flinging aside or transforming all that opposes the liberty of beautiful production, will be but faith to one's own meaning. The seeming baldness of *Le Rouge et Le Noir* is nothing in itself; the wild ornament of *Les Misérables* is nothing in itself; and the restraint of Flaubert, amid a real natural opulence, only redoubled beauty—the phrase so large and so precise at the same time, hard as bronze, in service to the more perfect adaptation of words to their matter. Afterthoughts, retouchings, finish, will be of profit only so far as they too really serve to bring out the original, initiative, generative, sense in them.

In this way, according to the well-known saying, "The style is the man," complex or simple, in his individuality, his plenary sense of what he really has to say, his sense of the world; all cautions regarding style arising out of so many natural scruples as to the medium through which alone he can expose that inward sense of things, the purity of this medium, its

laws or tricks of refraction: nothing is to be left there which might give conveyance to any matter save that. Style in all its varieties, reserved or opulent, terse, abundant, musical, stimulant, academic, so long as each is really characteristic or expressive, finds thus its justification, the sumptuous good taste of Cicero being as truly the man himself, and not another, justified, yet insured inalienably to him, thereby, as would have been his portrait by Raffaelle, in full consular splendor, on his ivory chair.

A relegation, you may say perhaps—a relegation of style to the subjectivity, the mere caprice, of the individual, which must soon transform it into mannerism. Not so! since there is, under the conditions supposed, for those elements of the man, for every lineament of the vision within, the one word, the one acceptable word, recognizable by the sensitive, by others “who have intelligence” in the matter, as absolutely as ever anything can be in the evanescent and delicate region of human language. The style, the manner, would be the man, not in his unreasoned and really uncharacteristic caprices, involuntary or affected, but in absolutely sincere apprehension of what is most real to him. But let us hear our French guide again.—

“Styles,” says Flaubert’s commentator, “*Styles*, as so many peculiar moulds, each of which bears the mark of

a particular writer, who is to pour into it the whole content of his ideas, were no part of his theory. What he believed in was *Style*: that is to say, a certain absolute and unique manner of expressing a thing, in all its intensity and color. For him the *form* was the work itself. As in living creatures, the blood, nourishing the body, determines its very contour and external aspect, just so, to his mind, the *matter*, the basis, in a work of art, imposed, necessarily, the unique, the just expression, the measure, the rhythm—the *form* in all its characteristics."

If the style be the man, in all the color and intensity of a veritable apprehension, it will be in a real sense "impersonal."

I said, thinking of books like Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, that prose literature was the characteristic art of the nineteenth century, as others, thinking of its triumphs since the youth of Bach, have assigned that place to music. Music and prose literature are, in one sense, the opposite terms of art; the art of literature presenting to the imagination, through the intelligence, a range of interests, as free and various as those which music presents to it through sense. And certainly the tendency of what has been here said is to bring literature too under those conditions, by conformity to which music takes rank as the typically perfect art. If music be the ideal of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the substance or matter, the

subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art.

Good art, but not necessarily great art; the distinction between great art and good art depending immediately, as regards literature at all events, not on its form, but on the matter. Thackeray's *Esmond*, surely, is greater art than *Vanity Fair*, by the greater dignity of its interests. It is on the quality of the matter it forms or controls, its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that the greatness of literary art depends, as *The Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Les Misérables*, *The English Bible*, are great art. Given the conditions I have tried to explain as constituting good art;—then, if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentation of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennable and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art; if, over and above those qualities I summoned up as mind and soul—that color and mystic perfume, and that reason-

able structure, it has something of the soul of humanity in it, and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life.

WALTER PATER: *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style.* Reprinted by permission of The Macmillan Company.

## SINCERITY

**N**O Style can be good that is not sincere. It must be the expression of its author's mind. There are, of course, certain elements of composition which must be mastered as a dancer learns his steps, but the style of the writer, like the grace of the dancer, is only made effective by such mastery; it springs from a deeper source. Initiation into the rules of construction will save us from some gross errors of composition, but it will not make a style. Still less will imitation of another's manner make one. In our day there are many who imitate Macaulay's short sentences, iterations, antitheses, geographical and historical illustrations, and eighteenth-century diction, but who accepts them as Macaulays? They cannot seize the secret of his charm, because that charm lies in the felicity of his talent, not in the structure of his sentences; in the fulness of his knowledge, not in the character of his illustrations. Other men aim at ease and vigor by discarding Latinisms, and admitting colloquialisms; but vigor and ease are not to be had on recipe. No study of models, no attention to rules, will give the easy turn, the graceful phrase, the simple word, the fervid

movement, or the large clearness; a picturesque talent will express itself in concrete images; a genial nature will smile in pleasant turns and innuendoes; a rapid, unhesitating, imperious mind will deliver its quick incisive phrases; a full, deliberating mind will overflow in ample paragraphs laden with the weight of parentheses and qualifying suggestions. The style which is good in one case would be vicious in another. The broken rhythm which increases the energy of one style would ruin the *largo* of another. Both are excellencies where both are natural.

We are always disagreeably impressed by an obvious imitation of the manner of another, because we feel it to be an insincerity, and also because it withdraws our attention from the thing said, to the way of saying it. And here lies the great lesson writers have to learn—namely, that they should think of the immediate purpose of their writing, which is to convey truths and emotions, in symbols and images, intelligible and suggestive. The racket-player keeps his eye on the ball he is to strike, not on the racket with which he strikes. If the writer sees vividly, and will say honestly what he sees, and how he sees it, he may want something of the grace and felicity of other men, but he will have all the strength and felicity with which nature has endowed him. More than that he cannot attain, and he will fall very short of it in snatching at the grace which is another's. Do what

he will, he cannot escape from the infirmities of his own mind: the affectation, arrogance, ostentation, hesitation, native in the man will taint his style, no matter how closely he may copy the manner of another. For evil and for good, *le style est de l'homme même.*

The French critics, who are singularly servile to all established reputations, and whose unreasoning idolatry of their own classics is one of the reasons why their Literature is not richer, are fond of declaring with magisterial emphasis that the rules of good taste and the canons of style were fixed once and forever by their great writers in the seventeenth century. The true ambition of every modern is said to be by careful study of these models to approach (though with no hope of equalling) their chastity and elegance. That a writer of the nineteenth century should express himself in the manner which was admirable in the seventeenth is an absurdity which needs only to be stated. It is not worth refuting. But it never presents itself thus to the French. In their minds it is a lingering remnant of that older superstition which believed the Ancients to have discovered all wisdom, so that if we could only surprise the secret of Aristotle's thoughts and clearly comprehend the drift of Plato's theories (which unhappily was not clear) we should compass all knowledge. How long this superstition lasted cannot accurately be settled;

perhaps it is not quite extinct even yet; but we know how little the most earnest students succeeded in surprising the secrets of the universe by reading Greek treatises, and how much by studying the universe itself. Advancing Science daily discredits the superstition; yet the advance of Criticism has not yet wholly discredited the parallel superstition in Art. The earliest thinkers are no longer considered the wisest, but the earliest artists are still proclaimed the finest. Even those who do not believe in this superiority are, for the most part, overawed by tradition and dare not openly question the supremacy of works which in their private convictions hold a very subordinate rank. And this reserve is encouraged by the intemperate scorn of those who question the supremacy without having the knowledge or the sympathy which could fairly appreciate the earlier artists. Attacks on the classics by men ignorant of the classical languages tend to perpetuate the superstition.

But be the merit of the classics, ancient and modern, what it may, no writer can become a classic by imitating them. The principle of Sincerity here ministers to the principle of Beauty by forbidding imitation and enforcing rivalry. Write what you can, and if you have the grace of felicitous expression or the power of energetic expression your style will be admirable and admired. At any rate see that it be your own, and not another's; on no other terms will the

world listen to it. You cannot be eloquent by borrowing from the opulence of another; you cannot be humorous by mimicking the whims of another; what was a pleasant smile dimpling his features becomes a grimace on yours.

It will not be supposed that I would have the great writers disregarded, as if nothing were to be learned from them; but the study of great writers should be the study of general principles as illustrated or revealed in these writers; and if properly pursued it will of itself lead to a condemnation of the notion of models. What we may learn from them is a nice discrimination of the symbols which intelligibly express the shades of meaning and kindle emotion. The writer wishes to give his thoughts a literary form. This is for others, not for himself; consequently he must, before all things, desire to be intelligible, and to be so he must adapt his expressions to the mental condition of his audience. If he employs arbitrary symbols, such as old words in new and unexpected senses, he may be clear as daylight to himself, but to others, dark as fog. And the difficulty of original writing lies in this, that which is new and individual must find expression in old symbols. This difficulty can only be mastered by a peculiar talent, strengthened and rendered nimble by practice, and the commerce with original minds. Great writers should be our companions if we would learn to write greatly; but no

familiarity with their manner will supply the place of native endowment. Writers are born, no less than poets, and like poets, they learn to make their native gifts effective. Practice, aiding their vigilant sensibility, teaches them, perhaps unconsciously, certain methods of effective presentation, how one arrangement of words carries with it more power than another, how familiar and concrete expressions are demanded in one place, and in another place abstract expressions unclogged with disturbing suggestions. Every author thus silently amasses a store of empirical rules, furnished by his own practice, and confirmed by the practice of others. A true Philosophy of Criticism would reduce these empirical rules to science by ranging them under psychological laws, thus demonstrating the validity of the rules, not in virtue of their having been employed by Cicero or Addison, by Burke or Sydney Smith, but in virtue of their conformity with the constancies of human nature.

The importance of Style is generally unsuspected by philosophers and men of science, who are quite aware of its advantage in all departments of *belles lettres*; and if you allude in their presence to the deplorably defective presentation of the ideas in some work distinguished for its learning, its profundity, or its novelty, it is probable that you will be despised as a frivolous setter up of manner over matter, a light-minded *dilettante*, unfitted for the simple

austerities of science. But this is itself a light-minded contempt; a deeper insight would change the tone, and help to remove the disgraceful slovenliness and feebleness of composition which deface the majority of grave works, except those written by Frenchmen, who have been taught that composition is an art and that no writer may neglect it. In England and Germany, men who will spare no labor in research, grudge all labor in style; a morning is cheerfully devoted to verifying a quotation, by one who will not spare ten minutes to reconstruct a clumsy sentence; a reference is sought with ardor, an appropriate expression in lieu of the inexact phrase which first suggests itself does not seem worth seeking. What are we to say to a man who spends a quarter's income on a diamond pin which he sticks in a greasy cravat? a man who calls public attention on him, and appears in a slovenly undress? Am I to bestow applause on some insignificant parade of erudition, and withhold blame from the stupidities of style which surround it?

Had there been a clear understanding of Style as the living body of thought, and not its "dress," which might be more or less ornamental, the error I am noticing would not have spread as widely. But, naturally, when men regarded the grace of style as mere grace of manner, and not as the delicate precision giving form and relief to matter—as mere ornament, stuck on to arrest incurious eyes, and not as effective

expression—their sense of the deeper value of matter made them despise such aid. A clearer conception would have rectified this error. The matter is confluent with the manner; and only *through* the style can thought reach the reader's mind. If the manner is involved, awkward, abrupt, obscure, the reader will either be oppressed with a confused sense of cumbrous material which awaits an artist to give it shape, or he will have the labor thrown upon him of extricating the material and reshaping it in his own mind.

How entirely men misconceive the relation of style to thought may be seen in the replies they make when their writing is objected to, or in the ludicrous attempts of clumsy playfulness and tawdry eloquence when they wish to be regarded as writers.

Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse,

and the principle of Sincerity, not less than the suggestions of taste, will preserve the integrity of each style. A philosopher, an investigator, an historian, or a moralist, so far from being required to present the graces of a wit, an essayist, a pamphleteer, or a novelist, would be warned off such ground by the necessity of expressing himself sincerely. Pascal, Biot, Buffon, or Laplace are examples of the clearness and beauty with which ideas may be presented wearing all the graces of fine literature, and losing none of the severity of science. Bacon, also, having an opulent and

active intellect, spontaneously expressed himself in forms of various excellence. But what a pitiable contrast is presented by Kant! It is true that Kant having a much narrower range of sensibility could have no such ample resource of expression, and he was wise in not attempting to rival the splendor of the *Novum Organum*; but he was not simply unwise, he was extremely culpable in sending forth his thoughts as so much raw material which the public was invited to put into shape as it could. Had he been aware that much of his bad writing was imperfect thinking, and always imperfect adaptation of means to ends, he might have been induced to recast it into more logical and more intelligible sentences, which would have stimulated the reader's mind as much as they now oppress it. Nor had Kant the excuse of a subject too abstruse for clear presentation. The examples of Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hume are enough to show how such subjects can be mastered, and the very implication of writing a book is that the writer has mastered his material and can give it intelligible form.

A grave treatise, dealing with a narrow range of subjects or moving and severe abstractions, demands a gravity and severity of style which is dissimilar to that demanded by subjects of a wider scope or more impassioned impulse; but abstract philosophy has its appropriate elegance no less than mathematics. I do not

mean that each subject should necessarily be confined to one special mode of treatment, in the sense which was understood when people spoke of the "dignity of history," and so forth. The style must express the writer's mind; and as variously constituted minds will treat one and the same subject, there will be varieties in their styles. If a severe thinker be also a man of wit, like Bacon, Hobbes, Pascal, or Galileo, the wit will flash its sudden illuminations on the argument; but if he be not a man of wit, and condescends to jest under the impression that by jesting he is giving an airy grace to his argument, we resent it as an impertinence.

I have throughout used Style in the narrower sense of expression rather than in the wider sense of "treatment" which is sometimes affixed to it. The mode of treating a subject is also no doubt the writer's or the artist's way of expressing what is in his mind, but this is Style in the more general sense, and does not admit of being reduced to laws apart from those of Vision and Sincerity. A man necessarily sees a subject in a particular light—ideal or grotesque, familiar or fanciful, tragic or humorous. He may wander into fairy-land, or move amid representative abstractions; he may follow his wayward fancy in its grotesque combinations, or he may settle down amid the homeliest details of daily life. But having chosen he must be true to his choice. He is not allowed to

represent fairy-land as if it resembled Walworth, nor to paint Walworth in the colors of Venice. The truth of consistency must be preserved in his treatment, truth in art meaning of course only truth within the limits of the art; thus the painter may produce the utmost relief he can by means of light and shade, but is peremptorily forbidden to use actual solidities on a plane surface. He must represent gold by color, not by sticking gold on his figures. Our applause is greatly determined by our sense of difficulty overcome, and to stick gold on a picture is an avoidance of the difficulty of painting it.

Truth of presentation has an inexplicable charm for us, and throws a halo round even ignoble objects. A policeman idly standing at the corner of the street, or a sow lazily sleeping against the sun, are not in nature objects to excite a thrill of delight, but a painter may, by the cunning of his art, represent them so as to delight every spectator. The same objects represented by an inferior painter will move only a languid interest; by a still more inferior painter they may be represented so as to please none but the most uncultivated eye. Each spectator is charmed in proportion to his recognition of a triumph over difficulty which is measured by the degree of verisimilitude. The degrees are many. In the lowest the pictured object is so remote from the reality that we simply recognize what the artist meant to represent. In like

manner we recognize in poor novels and dramas what the authors mean to be characters, rather than what our experience of life suggests as characteristic.

Not only do we apportion our applause according to the degree of verisimilitude attained, but also according to the difficulty each involves. It is a higher difficulty, and implies a nobler art, to represent the movement and complexity of life and emotion than to catch the fixed lineaments of outward aspect. To paint a policeman idly lounging at the street corner with such verisimilitude that we are pleased with the representation, admiring the solidity of the figure, the texture of the clothes, and the human aspect of the features, is so difficult that we loudly applaud the skill which enables an artist to imitate what in itself is uninteresting; and if the imitation be carried to a certain degree of verisimilitude the picture may be of immense value. But no excellence of representation can make this high art. To carry it into the region of high art, another and far greater difficulty must be overcome; the man must be represented under the strain of great emotion, and we must recognize an equal truthfulness in the subtle indications of great mental agitation, the fleeting characters of which are far less easy to observe and to reproduce, than the stationary characters of form and costume. We may often observe how the novelist or dramatist has tolerable success so long as his person-

ages are quiet, or moved only by the vulgar motives of ordinary life, and how fatally uninteresting, because unreal, these very personages become as soon as they are exhibited under the stress of emotion: their language ceases at once to be truthful, and becomes stagey; their conduct is no longer recognizable as that of human beings such as we have known. Here we note a defect of treatment, a mingling of styles, arising partly from defect of vision, and partly from an imperfect sincerity; and success in art will always be found dependent on integrity of style. The Dutch painters, so admirable in their own style, would become pitiable on quitting it for a higher. . . .

In all sincere speech there is power, not necessarily great power, but as much as the speaker is capable of. Speak for yourself and from yourself, or be silent. It can be of no good that you should tell in your "clever" feeble way what another has already told us with the dynamic energy of conviction. If you can tell us something that your own eyes have seen, your own mind has thought, your own heart has felt, you will have power over us, and all the real power that is possible for you. If what you have seen is trivial, if what you have thought is erroneous, if what you have felt is feeble, it would assuredly be better that you should not speak at all; but if you insist on speaking, Sincerity will secure the uttermost of power.

The delusions of self-love cannot be prevented, but intellectual misconceptions as to the means of achieving success may be corrected. Thus although it may not be possible for any introspection to discover whether we have genius or effective power, it is quite possible to know whether we are trading upon borrowed capital, and whether the eagle's feathers have been picked up by us, or grow from our own wings. I hear some one of my young readers exclaim against the disheartening tendency of what is here said. Ambitious of success, and conscious that he has no great resources within his own experience, he shrinks from the idea of being thrown upon his naked faculty and limited resources, when he feels himself capable of dexterously using the resources of others, and so producing an effective work. "Why," he asks, "must I confine myself to my own small experience, when I feel persuaded that it will interest no one? Why express the opinions to which my own investigations have led me when I suspect that they are incomplete, perhaps altogether erroneous, and when I know that they will not be popular because they are unlike those which have hitherto found favour? Your restrictions would reduce two-thirds of our writers to silence!"

This reduction would, I suspect, be welcomed by every one except the gagged writers; but as the idea of its being operative is too chimerical for us to enter-

tain it, and as the purpose of these pages is to expound the principles of success and failure, not to make quixotic onslaughts on the windmills of stupidity and conceit, I answer my young interrogator: "Take warning and do not write. Unless you believe in yourself, only noodles will believe in you, and they but tepidly. If your experience seems trivial to you, it must seem trivial to us. If your thoughts are not fervid convictions, or sincere doubts, they will not have the power of convictions and doubts. To believe in yourself is the first step; to proclaim your belief the next. You cannot assume the power of another. No jay becomes an eagle by borrowing a few eagle feathers. It is true that your sincerity will not be a guarantee of power. You may believe that to be important and novel which we all recognise as trivial and old. You may be a madman, and believe yourself a prophet. You may be a mere echo, and believe yourself a voice. These are among the delusions against which none of us are protected. But if Sincerity is not necessarily a guarantee of power, it is a necessary condition of power, and no genius or prophet can exist without it."

"The highest merit we ascribe to Moses, Plato, and Milton," says Emerson, "is that they set at nought books and traditions, and spoke not what men thought, but what they thought. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his

mind from within; more than the lustre of the firmament of bards and sages. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought because it is his. In every work of genius we recognise our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty." It is strange that any one who has recognised the individuality of all works of lasting influence, should not also recognise the fact that his own individuality ought to be steadfastly preserved. As Emerson says in continuation, "Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impressions with good-humoured inflexibility, then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else to-morrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our opinion from another." Accepting the opinions of another and tastes of another is very different from agreement in opinion and taste. Originality is independence, not rebellion; it is sincerity, not antagonism. Whatever you believe to be true and false, that proclaim to be true and false; whatever you think admirable and beautiful, that should be your model, even if all your friends and all the critics storm at you as a crotchet-monger and an eccentric. Whether the public will feel its truth and beauty at once, or after long years, or never cease to regard it as paradox and ugliness, no man

can foresee; enough for you to know that you have done your best, have been true to yourself, and that the utmost power inherent in your work has been displayed.

An orator whose purpose is to persuade men must speak the things they wish to hear; an orator, whose purpose is to move men, must also avoid disturbing the emotional effect by any obtrusion of intellectual antagonism; but an author whose purpose is to instruct men, who appeals to the intellect, must be careless of their opinions, and think only of truth. It will often be a question when a man is or is not wise in advancing unpalatable opinions, or in preaching heresies; but it can never be a question that a man should be silent if unprepared to speak the truth as he conceives it. Deference to popular opinion is one great source of bad writing, and is all the more disastrous because the deference is paid to some purely hypothetical requirement. When a man fails to see the truth of certain generally accepted views, there is no law compelling him to provoke animosity by announcing his dissent. He may be excused if he shrink from the lurid glory of martyrdom; he may be justified in not placing himself in a position of singularity. He may even be commended for not helping to perplex mankind with doubts which he feels to be founded on limited and possibly erroneous investigation. But if

allegiance to truth lays no stern command upon him to speak out his immature dissent, it does lay a stern command not to speak out hypocritical assent. There are many justifications of silence; there can be none of insincerity.

Nor is this less true of minor questions; it applies equally to opinions on matters of taste and personal feeling. Why should I echo what seem to me the extravagant praises of Raphael's "Transfiguration," when, in truth, I do not greatly admire that famous work? There is no necessity for me to speak on the subject at all; but if I do speak, surely it is to utter my impressions, and not to repeat what others have uttered. Here, then, is a dilemma; if I say what I really feel about this work, after vainly endeavouring day after day to discover the transcendent merits discovered by thousands (or at least proclaimed by them), there is every likelihood of my incurring the contempt of connoisseurs, and of being reproached with want of taste in art. This is the bugbear which scares thousands. For myself, I would rather incur the contempt of connoisseurs than my own; the reproach of defective taste is more endurable than the reproach of insincerity. Suppose I *am* deficient in the requisite knowledge and sensibility, shall I be less so by pretending to admire what really gives me no exquisite enjoyment? Will the pleasure I feel in pictures

be enhanced because other men consider me right in my admiration, or diminished because they consider me wrong? <sup>1</sup>

The opinion of the majority is not lightly to be rejected; but neither is it to be carelessly echoed. There is something noble in the submission to a great renown, which makes all reverence a healthy attitude if it be genuine. When I think of the immense fame of Raphael, and of how many high and delicate minds have found exquisite delight even in the "Transfiguration," and especially when I recall how others of his works have affected me, it is natural to feel some diffidence in opposing the judgment of men whose studies have given them the best means of forming that judgment—a diffidence which may keep me silent on the matter. To start with the assumption that you are right, and all who oppose you are fools, cannot be a safe method. Nor in spite of a conviction

<sup>1</sup> I have never thoroughly understood the painful anxiety of people to be shielded against the dishonouring suspicion of not rightly appreciating pictures, even when the very phrases they use betray their ignorance and insensibility. Many will avow their indifference to music, and almost boast of their ignorance of science; will sneer at abstract theories, and profess the most tepid interest in history, who would feel it an unpardonable insult if you doubted their enthusiasm for painting and the "old masters" (by them secretly identified with the brown masters). It is an insincerity fostered by general pretence. Each man is afraid to declare his real sentiments in the presence of others equally timid. Massive authority overawes genuine feeling.

that much of the admiration expressed for the "Transfiguration" is lip-homage and tradition, ought the non-admiring to assume that all of it is insincere. It is quite compatible with modesty to be perfectly independent, and with sincerity to be respectful to the opinions and tastes of others. If you express any opinion, you are bound to express your real opinion; let critics and admirers utter what dithyrambs they please. Were this terror of not being thought correct in taste once got rid of, how many stereotyped judgments on books and pictures would be broken up! and the result of this sincerity would be some really valuable criticism. In the presence of Raphael's "Sistine Madonna," Titian's "Peter the Martyr," or Masaccio's great frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel, one feels as if there had been nothing written about these mighty works, so little does any eulogy discriminate the elements of their profound effects, so little have critics expressed their own thoughts and feelings. Yet every day some wandering connoisseur stands before these pictures, and at once, without waiting to let them sink deep into his mind, discovers all the merits which are stereotyped in the criticisms, and discovers nothing else. He does not wait to feel, he is impatient to range himself with men of taste; he discards all genuine impressions, replacing them with vague concepts of what he is expected to see.

Inasmuch as success must be determined by the re-

lation between the work and the public, the sincerity which leads a man into open revolt against established opinions may seem to be an obstacle. Indeed, publishers, critics, and friends are always loud in their prophecies against originality and independence on this very ground; they do their utmost to stifle every attempt at novelty, because they fix their eyes upon a hypothetical public taste, and think that only what has already been proved successful can again succeed; forgetting that whatever has once been done need not be done over again, and forgetting that what is now commonplace was once originality. There are cases in which a disregard of public opinion will inevitably call forth opprobrium and neglect; but there is no case in which Sincerity is not strength. If I advance new views in Philosophy or Theology, I cannot expect to have many adherents among minds altogether unprepared for such views; yet it is certain that even those who most fiercely oppose me will recognise the power of my voice if it is not a mere echo; and the very novelty will challenge attention, and at last gain adherents if my views have any real insight. At any rate the point to be considered is this, that whether the novel views excite opposition or applause, the one condition of their success is that they be believed in by the propagator. The public can only be really moved by what is genuine. Even an error if believed in will have greater force than

an insincere truth. Lip-advocacy only rouses lip-homage. It is belief which gives momentum.

Nor is it any serious objection to what is here said, that insincerity and timid acquiescence in the opinion and tastes of the public do often gain applause and temporary success. Sanding the sugar is not immediately unprofitable. There is an unpleasant popularity given to falsehood in this world of ours; but we love the truth notwithstanding, and with a more enduring love. Who does not know what it is to listen to public speakers pouring forth expressions of hollow belief and sham enthusiasm, snatching at commonplaces with a fervour as of faith, emphasising insincerities as if to make up by emphasis what is wanting in feeling, all the while saying not only what they do not believe, but what the listeners *know* they do not believe, and what the listeners, though they roar assent, do not themselves believe—a turbulence of sham, the very noise of which stuns the conscience? Is such an orator really enviable, although thunders of applause may have greeted his efforts? Is that success, although the newspapers all over the kingdom may be reporting the speech? What influence remains when the noise of the shouts has died away? Whereas, if on the same occasion one man gave utterance to a sincere thought, even if it were not a very wise thought, although the silence of the public—perhaps its hisses—may have produced an impression of

failure, yet there is success, for the thought will reappear and mingle with the thoughts of men to be adopted or combated by them, and may perhaps in a few years mark out the speaker as a man better worth listening to than the noisy orator whose insincerity was so much cheered.

The same observation applies to books. An author who waits upon the times, and utters only what he thinks the world will like to hear, who sails with the stream, admiring everything which it is “correct taste” to admire, despising everything which has not yet received that Hallmark, sneering at the thoughts of a great thinker not yet accepted as such, and slavishly repeating the small phrases of a thinker who has gained renown, flippant and contemptuous towards opinions which he has not taken the trouble to understand, and never venturing to oppose even the errors of men in authority, such an author may indeed by dint of a certain dexterity in assorting the mere husks of opinion gain the applause of reviewers, who will call him a thinker, and of indolent men and women who will pronounce him “so clever”; but triumphs of this kind are like oratorical triumphs after dinner. Every autumn the earth is strewed with the dead leaves of such vernal successes.

I would not have the reader conclude that because I advocate plain-speaking even of unpopular views, I mean to imply that originality and sincerity are al-

ways in opposition to public opinion. There are many points both of doctrine and feeling in which the world is not likely to be wrong. But in all cases it is desirable that men should not pretend to believe opinions which they really reject, or express emotions they do not feel. And this rule is universal. Even truthful and modest men will sometimes violate the rule under the mistaken idea of being eloquent by means of the diction of eloquence. This is a source of bad Literature. There are certain views in Religion, Ethics, and Politics, which readily lend themselves to eloquence, because eloquent men have written largely on them, and the temptation to secure this facile effect often seduces men to advocate these views, in preference to views they really see to be more rational. That this eloquence at second-hand is but feeble in its effect, does not restrain others from repeating it. Experience never seems to teach them that grand speech comes only from grand thoughts, passionate speech from passionate emotions. The pomp and roll of words, the trick of phrase, the rhythm and the gesture of an orator, may all be imitated, but not his eloquence. No man was ever eloquent by trying to be eloquent, but only by being so. Trying leads to the vice of "fine writing"—the plague-spot of Literature, not only unhealthy in itself, and vulgarising the grand language which should be reserved for great thoughts, but encouraging that tendency to select only those

views upon which a spurious enthusiasm can most readily graft the representative abstractions and stirring suggestions which will move public applause. The “fine writer” will always prefer the opinion which is striking to the opinion which is true. He frames his sentences by the ear, and is only dissatisfied with them when their cadences are ill-distributed, or their diction is too familiar. It seldom occurs to him that a sentence should accurately express his meaning and no more; indeed there is not often a definite meaning to be expressed, for the thought which arose vanished while he tried to express it, and the sentence, instead of being determined by and moulded on a thought, is determined by some verbal suggestion. Open any book or periodical, and see how frequently the writer does not, cannot, mean what he says; and you will observe that in general the defect does not arise from any poverty in our language, but from the habitual carelessness which allows expressions to be written down unchallenged provided they are sufficiently harmonious, and not glaringly inadequate.

The slapdash insincerity of modern style entirely sets at nought the first principle of writing, which is accuracy. The art of writing is not, as many seem to imagine, the art of bringing fine phrases into rhythmical order, but the art of placing before the reader intelligible symbols of the thoughts and feelings in the writer’s mind. Endeavour to be faithful, and if

there is any beauty in your thought, your style will be beautiful; if there is any real emotion to express, the expression will be moving. Never rouge your style. Trust to your native pallor rather than to cosmetics. Try to make us see what you see and to feel what you feel, and banish from your mind whatever phrases others may have used to express what was in their thoughts, but is not in yours. Have you never observed what a slight impression writers have produced, in spite of a profusion of images, antitheses, witty epigrams, and rolling periods, whereas some simpler style, altogether wanting in such "brilliant passage," has gained the attention and respect of thousands? Whatever is stuck on as ornament affects us as ornament; we do not think an old hag young and handsome because the jewels flash from her brow and bosom; if we envy her wealth, we do not admire her beauty.

What "fine writing" is to prosaists, insincere imagery is to poets: it is introduced for effect, not used as expression. To the real poet an image comes spontaneously, or if it comes as an afterthought, it is chosen because it expresses his meaning and helps to paint the picture which is in his mind, not because it is beautiful in itself. It is a symbol, not an ornament. Whether the image rise slowly before the mind during the contemplation, or is seen in the same flash which discloses the picture, in each case it arises by

natural association, and is *seen*, not *sought*. The inferior poet is dissatisfied with what he sees, and casts about in search after something more striking. He does not wait till an image is borne in upon the tide of memory, he seeks for an image that will be picturesque; and being without the delicate selective instinct which guides the fine artist, he generally chooses something which we feel to be not exactly in its right place. He thus—

With gold and silver covers every part,  
And hides with ornament his want of art.

Be true to your own soul, and do not try to express the thought of another. “If some people,” says Ruskin, “really see angels where others see only empty space, let them paint the angels: only let not anybody else think *he* can paint an angel too, on any calculated principles of the angelic.” Unhappily this is precisely what so many will attempt, inspired by the success of the angelic painter. Nor will the failure of others warn them.

Whatever is sincerely felt or believed, whatever forms part of the imaginative experience, and is not simply imitation or hearsay, may fitly be given to the world, and will always maintain an infinite superiority over imitative splendour; because although it by no means follows that whatever has formed part of the artist’s experience must be impressive, or can do

without artistic presentation, yet his artistic power will always be greater over his own material than over another's. Emerson has well remarked that "those facts, words, persons, which dwell in a man's memory without his being able to say why, remain, because they have a relation to him not less real for being as yet unapprehended. They are symbols of value to him, as they can interpret parts of his consciousness which he would vainly seek words for in the conventional images of books and other minds. What attracts my attention shall have it, as I will go to the man who knocks at my door, while a thousand persons, as worthy, go by it, to whom I give no regard. It is enough that these particulars speak to me. A few anecdotes, a few traits of character, manners, face, a few incidents have an emphasis in your memory out of all proportion to their apparent significance, if you measure them by the ordinary standards. They relate to your gift. Let them have their weight, and do not reject them, and cast about for illustrations and facts more usual in literature."

In the notes to the last edition of his poems, Wordsworth specified the particular occasions which furnished him with particular images. It was the things he had *seen* which he put into his verses; and that is why they affect us. It matters little whether the poet draws his images directly from present experience, or indirectly from memory—whether the sight of the

slow-sailing swan, that “floats double, swan and shadow” be at once transferred to the scene of the poem he is writing, or come back to him in after years to complete some picture in his mind; enough that the image be suggested, and not sought.

The sentence from Ruskin, quoted just now, will guard against the misconception that a writer, because told to rely on his own experience, is enjoined to forego the glory and delight of creation even of fantastic types. He is only told never to pretend to see what he has not seen. He is urged to follow Imagination in her most erratic course, though like a will-o'-wisp she lead over marsh and fen away from the haunts of mortals; but not to pretend that he is following a will-o'-wisp when his vagrant fancy never was allured by one. It is idle to paint fairies and goblins unless you have a genuine vision of them which forces you to paint them. They are poetical objects, but only to poetic minds. “Be a plain topographer if you possibly can,” says Ruskin, “if Nature meant you to be anything else, she will force you to it; but never try to be a prophet; go on quietly with your hard camp-work, and the spirit will come to you in the camp, as it did to Eldad and Medad, if you are appointed to have it.” Yes: if you are appointed to have it; if your faculties are such that this high success is possible, it will come, provided the faculties are employed with

sincerity. Otherwise it cannot come. No insincere effort can secure it.

If the advice I give to reject every insincerity in writing seem cruel, because it robs the writer of so many of his effects—if it seem disheartening to earnestly warn a man not to *try* to be eloquent, but only to *be* eloquent when his thoughts move with an impassioned *largo*—if throwing a writer back upon his naked faculty seem especially distasteful to those who have a painful misgiving that their faculty is small, and that the uttermost of their own power would be far from impressive, my answer is that I have no hope of dissuading feeble writers from the practice of insincerity, but as under no circumstances can they become good writers and achieve success, my analysis has no reference to them, my advice has no aim at them.

It is to the young and strong, to the ambitious and the earnest, that my words are addressed. It is to wipe the film from their eyes, and make them see, as they will see directly the truth is placed before them, how easily we are all seduced into greater or less insincerity of thought, of feeling, and of style, either by reliance on other writers, from whom we catch the trick of thought and turn of phrase, or from some preconceived view of what the public will prefer. It is to the young and strong I say: Watch

vigilantly every phrase you write, and assure yourself that it expresses what you mean; watch vigilantly every thought you express, and assure yourself that it is yours, not another's; you may share it with another, but you must not adopt it from him for the nonce. Of course, if you are writing humourously or dramatically, you will not be expected to write your own serious opinions. Humour may take its utmost licence, yet be sincere. The dramatic genius may incarnate itself in a hundred shapes, yet in each it will speak what it feels to be the truth. If you are imaginatively representing the feelings of another, as in some playful exaggeration or some dramatic personation, the truth required of you is imaginative truth, not your personal views and feelings. But when you write in your own person you must be rigidly veracious, neither pretending to admire what you do not admire, or to despise what in secret you rather like, nor surcharging your admiration and enthusiasm to bring you into unison with the public chorus. This vigilance may render Literature more laborious; but no one ever supposed that success was to be had on easy terms; and if you only write one sincere page where you might have written twenty insincere pages, the one page is worth writing—it is Literature.

Sincerity is not only effective and honourable, it is also much less difficult than is commonly supposed. To take a trifling example: If for some reason I can-

not, or do not, choose to verify a quotation which may be useful to my purpose, what is to prevent my saying that the quotation is taken at second-hand? It is true, if my quotations are for the most part second-hand and are acknowledged as such, my erudition will appear scanty. But it will only appear what it is. Why should I pretend to an erudition which is not mine? Sincerity forbids it. Prudence whispers that the pretence is, after all, vain, because those, and those alone, who can rightly estimate erudition will infallibly detect my pretence, whereas those whom I have deceived were not worth deceiving. Yet in spite of Sincerity and Prudence, how shamelessly men compile second-hand references, and display in borrowed foot-notes a pretence of labour and of accuracy! I mention this merely to show how, even in the humbler class of compilers, the Principle of Sincerity may find fit illustrations, and how honest work, even in references, belongs to the same category as honest work in philosophy or poetry.

G. H. LEWES: *Principles of Success in Literature.*

## ACCURACY

**I**N order to form a good style, the primary rule and condition is, not to attempt to express ourselves in language before we thoroughly know our own meaning:—when a man perfectly understands himself, appropriate diction will generally be at his command either in writing or speaking. In such cases the thoughts and the words are associated. In the next place precision in the use of terms is required, and the test is whether you can translate the phrase adequately into simpler terms, regard being had to the feeling of the whole passage. Try this upon Shakespeare, or Milton, and see if you can substitute other simpler words in any given passage without a violation of the meaning or tone. The source of bad writing is the desire to be something more than a man of sense,—the straining to be thought a genius; and it is just the same in speech-making. If men would only say what they have to say in plain terms, how much more eloquent they would be! . . . And I cannot conclude this Lecture without insisting on the importance of accuracy of style as being near akin to veracity and truthful habits of mind; he who

thinks loosely will write loosely, and, perhaps, there is some moral inconvenience in the common forms of our grammars which give our children so many obscure terms for material distinctions. Let me also exhort you to careful examination of what you read, if it be worth any perusal at all; such an examination will be a safeguard from fanaticism, the universal origin of which is in the contemplation of phenomena without investigation into their causes.

S. T. COLERIDGE: *On Style.*

## ECONOMY

COMMENTING on the seeming incongruity between his father's argumentative powers and his ignorance of formal logic, Tristram Shandy says: "It was a matter of just wonder with my worthy tutor, and two or three fellows of that learned society, that a man who knew not so much as the names of his tools, should be able to work after that fashion with them." Sterne's intended implication that a knowledge of the principles of reasoning neither makes, nor is essential to, a good reasoner, is doubtless true. Thus, too, is it with grammar. As Dr. Latham, condemning the usual school-drill in Lindley Murray, rightly remarks: "Gross vulgarity is a fault to be prevented; but the proper prevention is to be got from habit—not rules." Similarly, there can be little question that good composition is far less dependent upon acquaintance with its laws, than upon practice and natural aptitude. A clear head, a quick imagination, and a sensitive ear, will go far towards making all rhetorical precepts needless. He who daily hears and reads well-framed sentences, will naturally more or less tend to use similar ones. And where there exists

any mental idiosyncrasy—where there is a deficient verbal memory, or an inadequate sense of logical dependence, or but little perception of order, or a lack of constructive ingenuity—no amount of instruction will remedy the defect. Nevertheless, *some* practical result may be expected from a familiarity with the principles of style. The endeavor to conform to laws may tell, though slowly. And if in no other way, yet, as facilitating revision, a knowledge of the things to be achieved—a clear idea of what constitutes a beauty, and what a blemish—cannot fail to be of service.

No general theory of expression seems yet to have been enunciated. The maxims contained in works on composition and rhetoric, are presented in an unorganized form.

On seeking for some clue to the law underlying these current maxims, we may see shadowed forth in many of them, the importance of economizing the reader's or hearer's attention. To so present ideas that they may be apprehended with the least possible mental effort, is the desideratum towards which most of the rules above quoted point. When we condemn writing that is wordy, or confused, or intricate—when we praise this style as easy, and blame that as fatiguing, we consciously or unconsciously assume this desideratum as our standard of judgment. Regarding language as an apparatus of symbols for the conveyance of thought, we may say that, as in a mechanical

apparatus, the more simple and the better arranged its parts, the greater will be the effect produced. In either case, whatever force is absorbed by the machine is deducted from the result. A reader or listener has at each moment but a limited amount of mental power available. To recognize and interpret the symbols presented to him, requires part of this power; to arrange and combine the images suggested requires a further part; and only that part which remains can be used for realizing the thought conveyed. Hence, the more time and attention it takes to receive and understand each sentence, the less time and attention can be given to the contained idea; and the less vividly will that idea be conceived.

How truly language must be regarded as a hindrance to thought, though the necessary instrument of it, we shall clearly perceive on remembering the comparative force with which simple ideas are communicated by signs. To say, "Leave the room," is less expressive than to point to the door. Placing a finger on the lips is more forcible than whispering, "Do not speak." A beck of the hand is better than, "Come here." No phrase can convey the idea of surprise so vividly as opening the eyes and raising the eyebrows. A shrug of the shoulders would lose much by translation into words. Again, it may be remarked that when oral language is employed, the strongest effects are produced by interjections, which condense entire sen-

tences into syllables. And in other cases, where custom allows us to express thoughts by single words, as in *Beware*, *Heigho*, *Fudge*, much force would be lost by expanding them into specific propositions. Hence, carrying out the metaphor that language is the vehicle of thought, there seems reason to think that in all cases the friction and inertia of the vehicle deduct from its efficiency; and that in composition, the chief, if not the sole, thing to be done is to reduce this friction and inertia to the smallest possible amount. Let us then inquire whether economy of the recipient's attention is not the secret of effect, alike in the right choice and collocation of words, in the best arrangement of clauses in a sentence, in the proper order of its principal and subordinate propositions, in the judicious use of simile, metaphor, and other figures of speech, and even in the rhythmical sequence of syllables. . . .

That concrete terms produce more vivid impressions than abstract ones, and should, when possible, be used instead, is a current maxim of composition. As Dr. Campbell says, "The more general the terms are, the picture is the fainter; the more special they are, 'tis the brighter." We should avoid such a sentence as:

In proportion as the manners, customs, and amusements of a nation are cruel and barbarous, the regulations of their penal code will be severe.

And in place of it we should write:

In proportion as men delight in battles, bull-fights, and combats of gladiators, will they punish by hanging, burning, and the rack.

This superiority of specific expressions is clearly due to a saving of the effort required to translate words into thoughts. As we do not think in generals but in particulars—as, whenever any class of things is referred to, we represent it to ourselves by calling to mind individual members of it; it follows that when an abstract word is used, the hearer or reader has to choose from his stock of images, one or more, by which he may figure to himself the genus mentioned. In doing this, some delay must arise—some force be expended; and if, by employing a specific term, an appropriate image can be at once suggested, an economy is achieved, and a more vivid impression produced.

Turning now from the choice of words to their sequence, we shall find the same general principle hold good. We have *a priori* reasons for believing that in every sentence there is some one order of words more effective than any other; and that this order is the one which presents the elements of the proposition in the succession in which they may be most readily put together. As in a narrative, the events should be stated in such sequence that the mind may not have

to go backwards and forwards in order to rightly connect them; as in a group of sentences, the arrangements should be such, that each of them may be understood as it comes, without waiting for subsequent ones; so in every sentence, the sequence of words should be that which suggests the constituents of the thought in the order most convenient for the building up that thought.

HERBERT SPENCER: *The Philosophy of Style.*

## A SIMPLE AND AN ORNATE STYLE

**T**HERE is one thing more about which the Society has been most solicitous; and that is, the manner of their discourse: which unless they had been very watchful to keep in due temper, the whole spirit and vigour of their design had been soon eaten out by the luxury and redundancy of speech. The ill effects of this superfluity of talking have already overwhelmed most other arts and professions; inasmuch, that when I consider the means of happy living, and the causes of their corruption, I can hardly forbear recanting what I said before, and concluding that eloquence ought to be banished out of all civil societies, as a thing fatal to peace and good manners. To this opinion I should wholly incline; if I did not find that it is a weapon which may be as easily procured by bad men as good: and that, if these should only cast it away, and those retain it; the naked innocence of virtue would be upon all occasions exposed to the armed malice of the wicked. This is the chief reason that should now keep up the ornaments of speaking in any request; since they are so much degenerated from their original usefulness. They were at first, no doubt,

an admirable instrument in the hands of wise men; when they were only employed to describe goodness, honesty, obedience, in larger, fairer, and more moving images: to represent truth, clothed with bodies; and to bring knowledge back again to our very senses, from whence it was at first derived to our understandings. But now they are generally changed to worse uses: they make the fancy disgust the best things, if they come sound and unadorned; they are in open defiance against reason, professing not to hold much correspondence with that; but with its slaves, the passions: they give the mind a motion too changeable and bewitching to consist with right practice. Who can behold without indignation how many mists and uncertainties these specious tropes and figures have brought on our knowledge? How many rewards, which are due to more profitable and difficult arts, have been still snatched away by the easy vanity of fine speaking? For, now I am warmed with this just anger, I cannot withhold myself from betraying the shallowness of all these seeming mysteries, upon which we writers, and speakers, look so big. And, in few words, I dare say that of all the studies of men, nothing may be sooner obtained than this vicious abundance of phrase, this trick of metaphors, this volubility of tongue, which makes so great a noise in the world. But I spend words in vain; for the evil is now so inveterate, that it is hard to know whom to blame,

or where to begin to reform. We all value one another so much upon this beautiful deceit, and labour so long after it in the years of our education, that we cannot but ever after think kinder of it than it deserves. And indeed, in most other parts of learning, I look upon it as a thing almost utterly desperate in its cure: and I think it may be placed among those general mischiefs, such as the dissension of Christian princes, the want of practice in religion, and the like, which have been so long spoken against that men are become insensible about them; every one shifting off the fault from himself to others; and so they are only made bare common-places of complaint. It will suffice my present purpose to point out what has been done by the Royal Society towards the correcting of its excesses in natural philosophy; to which it is, of all others, a most professed enemy.

They have therefore been most rigorous in putting in execution the only remedy that can be found for this extravagance, and that has been, a constant resolution to reject all the amplifications, digressions, and swellings of style; to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men delivered so many things, almost in an equal number of words. They have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness: bringing all things as near

the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the language of artizans, countrymen, and merchants, before that of wits or scholars.

THOMAS SPRAT: *History of the Royal Society.*

## SIMPLICITY

**T**HE first obligation of Economy is that of using the fewest words to secure the fullest effect. It rejects whatever is superfluous; but the question of superfluity must, as I showed just now, be determined in each individual case by various conditions too complex and numerous to be reduced within a formula. The same may be said of Simplicity, which is indeed so intimately allied with Economy that I have only given it a separate station for purposes of convenience. The psychological basis is the same for both. The desire for Simplicity is impatience at superfluity, and the impatience arises from a sense of hindrance.

The first obligation of Simplicity is that of using the simplest means to secure the fullest effect. But although the mind instinctively rejects all needless complexity, we shall greatly err if we fail to recognize the fact, that what the mind recoils from is not the complexity, but the needlessness. When two men are set to the work of one, there is a waste of means; when two phrases are used to express one meaning twice, there is a waste of power; when incidents are multiplied and illustrations crowded without increase

of illumination, there is prodigality which only the vulgar can mistake for opulence. Simplicity is a relative term. If in sketching the head of a man the artist wishes only to convey the general characteristics of that head, the fewest touches show the greatest power, selecting as they do only those details which carry with them characteristic significance. The means are simple, as the effect is simple. But if, besides the general characteristics, he wishes to convey the modelling of the forms, the play of light and shade, the textures, and the very complex effect of a human head, he must use more complex means. The simplicity which was adequate in the one case becomes totally inadequate in the other.

Obvious as this is, it has not been sufficiently present to the mind of critics who have called for plain, familiar, and concrete diction, as if that alone could claim to be simple; who have demanded a style unadorned by the artifices of involution, cadence, imagery, and epigram, as if Simplicity were incompatible with these; and have praised meagreness, mistaking it for Simplicity. Saxon words are words which in their homeliness have deep-seated power, and in some places they are the simplest because the most powerful words we can employ; but their very homeliness excludes them from certain places where their very power of suggestion is a disturbance of the general effect. The selective instinct of the artist tells him

when his language should be homely, and when it should be more elevated; and it is precisely in the imperceptible blending of the plain with the ornate that a great writer is distinguished. He uses the simplest phrases without triviality, and the grandest without a suggestion of grandiloquence.

Simplicity of Style will therefore be understood as meaning absence of needless superfluity:

Without o'erflowing full.

Its plainness is never meagreness, but unity. Obedient to the primary impulse of *adequate* expression, the style of a complex subject should be complex; of a technical subject, technical; of an abstract subject, abstract; of a familiar subject, familiar; of a pictorial subject, picturesque. The structure of the "Antigone" is simple; but so also is the structure of "Othello," though it contains many more elements; the simplicity of both lies in their fulness without superfluity.

Whatever is outside the purpose, or the feeling, of a scene, a speech, a sentence, or a phrase, whatever may be omitted without sacrifice of effect, is a sin against this law. I do not say that the incident, description, or dialogue, which may be omitted without injury to the unity of the work, is necessarily a sin against art; still less that, even when acknowledged as a sin, it may not sometimes be condoned by its success. The law of Simplicity is not the only law

of art; and, moreover, audiences are, unhappily, so little accustomed to judge works as wholes, and so ready to seize upon any detail which pleases them, no matter how incongruously the detail may be placed, that a felicitous fault will captivate applause, let critics shake reproving heads as they may. Nevertheless the law of Simplicity remains unshaken, and ought only to give way to the pressure of the law of Variety. . . .

G. H. LEWES: *Principles of Success in Literature.*

## SIMPLICITY IN ART

ONCE upon a time I had occasion to buy so uninteresting a thing as a silver soup-ladle. The salesman at the silversmith's was obliging and for my inspection brought forth quite an array of ladles. But my purse was flaccid, anemic, and I must pick and choose with all the discrimination in the world. I wanted to make a brave showing with my gift—to get a great deal for my money. I went through a world of soup-ladles—ladles with gilded bowls, with embossed handles, with chased arabesques, but there were none to my taste. "Or perhaps," says the salesman, "you would care to look at something like this," and he brought out a ladle that was as plain and as unadorned as the unclouded sky—and about as beautiful. Of all the others this was the most to my liking. But the price! ah, that anemic purse; and I must put it from me! It was nearly double the cost of any of the rest. And when I asked why, the salesman said:

"You see, in this highly ornamental ware the flaws of the material don't show, and you can cover up a blowhole or the like by wreaths and beading. But this

plain ware has got to be the very best. Every defect is apparent."

And there, if you please, is a conclusive comment upon the whole business—a final basis of comparison of all things whether commercial or artistic; the bare dignity of the unadorned that may stand before the world all unashamed, panoplied rather than clothed in the consciousness of perfection. We of this latter day, we painters and poets and writers—artists—must labour with all the wits of us, all the strength of us, and with all that we have of ingenuity and perseverance to attain simplicity. But it has not always been so. At the very earliest, men—forgotten, ordinary men—were born with an easy, unblurred vision that to-day we would hail as marvelous genius. Suppose, for instance, the New Testament was all unwritten and one of us were called upon to tell the world that Christ was born, to tell of how we had seen Him, that this was the Messiah. How the adjectives would marshal upon the page, how the exclamatory phrases would cry out, how we would elaborate and elaborate, and how our rhetoric would flare and blazen till—so we should imagine—the ear would ring and the very eye would be dazzled; and even then we would believe that our words were all so few and feeble. It is beyond words, we would vociferate. So it would be. That is very true—words of ours. Can you not see how we should dramatize it? We would make a point

of the transcendent stillness of the hour, of the deep blue of the Judean midnight, of the liplapping of Galilee, the murmur of Jordan, the peacefulness of sleeping Jerusalem. Then the stars, the descent of the angel, the shepherds—all the accessories. And our narrative would be as commensurate with the subject as the flippant smartness of a “bright” reporter in the Sistine chapel. We would be striving to cover up our innate incompetence, our impotence to do justice to the mighty theme by elaborateness of design and arabesque intricacy of rhetoric.

But on the other hand—listen:

“The days were accomplished that she should be delivered, and she brought forth her first born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Simplicity could go no further. Absolutely not one word unessential, not a single adjective that is not merely descriptive. The whole matter stated with the terseness of a military report, and yet—there is the epic, the world epic, beautiful, majestic, incomparably dignified, and no ready writer, no Milton nor Shakespere, with all the wealth of their vocabularies, with all the resources of their genius, with all their power of simile or metaphor, their pomp of eloquence or their royal pageantry of hexameters, could produce

the effect contained in these two simple declarative sentences.

The mistake that we little people are so prone to make is this: that the more intense the emotional quality of the scene described, the more "vivid," the more exalted, the more richly coloured we suppose should be the language.

When the crisis of the tale is reached there is where we like the author to spread himself, to show the effectiveness of his treatment. But if we would only pause to take a moment's thought we must surely see that the simplest, even the barest statement of fact is not only all-sufficient but all-appropriate.

Elaborate phrase, rhetoric, the intimacy of metaphor and allegory and simile is forgivable for the unimportant episodes where the interest of the narrative is languid; where we are willing to watch the author's ingenuity in the matter of scrolls and fret-work and mosaics-roccoco work. But when the catastrophe comes, when the narrative swings clear upon its pivot and we are lifted with it from out the world of our surroundings, we want to forget the author. We want no adjectives to blur our substantives. The substantives may now speak for themselves. We want no metaphor, no simile to make clear the matter. If at this moment of drama and intensity the matter is not of itself preëminently clear, no verbiage, however ingenious, will clarify it. Heighten the ef-

fect. Does exclamation and heroics on the part of the bystanders ever make the curbstone drama more poignant? Who would care to see Niagara through coloured fire and calcium lights?

The simple treatment, whether of a piece of silversmith work or of a momentous religious epic, is always the most difficult of all. It demands more of the artist. The unskilful story-teller as often as not tells the story to himself as well as to his hearers as he goes along. Not sure of exactly how he is to reach the end, not sure even of the end itself, he must feel his way from incident to incident, from page to page, fumbling, using many words, repeating himself. To hide the confusion there is one resource—elaboration, exaggerated outline, violent colour, till at last the unstable outline disappears under the accumulation, and the reader is to be so dazzled with the wit of the dialogue, the smartness of the repartee, the felicity of the diction, that he will not see the gaps and lapses in the structure itself—just as the “nobby” drummer wears a wide and showy scarf to conceal a soiled shirt-bosom.

But in the master-works of narrative there is none of this shamming, no shoddyism, no humbug. There is little more than bare outline, but in the care with which it is drawn, how much thought, what infinite pains go to the making of each stroke, so that when it is made it falls just at the right place and exactly

in its right sequence. This attained, what need is there for more? Comment is superfluous. If the author make the scene appear terrible to the reader, he need not say in himself or in the mouth of some protagonist, "It is terrible!" If the picture is pathetic so that he who reads must weep, how superfluous, how intrusive should the author exclaim, "It was pitiful to the point of tears." If beautiful, we do not want him to tell us so. We want him to make it beautiful and our own appreciation will supply the adjectives.

Beauty, the ultimate philosophical beauty, is not a thing of elaboration, but on the contrary of an almost barren nudity: a jewel may be an exquisite gem, a woman may have a beautiful arm, but the bracelet does not make the arm more beautiful, nor the arm the bracelet. One must admire them separately, and the moment that the jewel ceases to have a value or a reason upon the arm it is better in the case, where it may enjoy an undivided attention.

But after so many hundreds of years of art and artists, of civilization and progress, we have got so far away from the sane old homely uncomplex way of looking out at the world that the simple things no longer charm, and the simple declarative sentence, straightforward, plain, seems flat to our intellectual palate—flat and tasteless and crude.

What we would now call simple our forbears would look upon as a farrago of gimcrackery, and all

our art—the art of the better-minded of us—is only a striving to get back to the unblurred, direct simplicity of those writers who could see that the Wonderful, the Counselor, the mighty God, the Prince of Peace, could be laid in a manger and yet be the Saviour of the world.

It is this same spirit, this disdaining of simplicity that has so warped and inflated The First Story, making of it a pomp, an affair of gold-embroidered vestments and costly choirs, of marbles, of jeweled windows and of incense, unable to find the thrill as formerly in the plain and humble stable, and the brown-haired, grave-eyed peasant girl, with her little baby; unable to see the beauty in the crumbling mud walls, the low-ceiled interior, where the only incense was the sweet smell of the cow's breath, the only vestments the swaddling clothes, rough, coarse-fibered, from the hand-looms of Nazareth, the only pomp the scanty gifts of three old men, and the only chanting the crooning of a young mother holding her first-born babe upon her breast.

FRANK NORRIS: *The Responsibilities of the Novelist*. Copyright by Doubleday Page and Co., 1903. Used by permission of Doubleday Page, and Co.

## SUGGESTION IN ART

**I**T is by suggestion that the greatest truths of art are brought home to us. The realist does not care for this method of approach. He is bent upon realization. He is analytical in his statement of each and every fact and makes a full report. All painters do this in some degree during the early stages of their career, but as they advance in years and experience there is a tendency to a broader treatment, a return to the simple line of the child, to the synthesis of a Millet, as shown in the arms, hands, and backs of the women in "The Gleaners," to the implication and suggestion of a Corot, as shown in the sky of the "Biblis." Facts are summarized. A mere charcoal outline drawn by Degas gives us the reliefs, proportions, weight, and bulk of a human figure; a shadow with Giorgione or Rembrandt sums up the series of facts beneath it, and becomes suggestive by its very mystery and uncertainty; a blended blur of color by Whistler may bring to mind a heaving wave in mid-ocean better than all the drawn and tinted and "realized" waves of all the realists.

It is not the heaping of fact upon fact that flashes the truth upon us—at least not in art, though it may in logic or in law. Indeed, the accumulation of evi-

dence often confuses. It is common studio experience that a sketch of a picture is frequently better than the picture itself. The attempt to "finish" (that is, to put in all the details and minutiae) makes it dull and unsuggestive. The unfinished marbles of Michael Angelo, do they really suffer much by being unfinished? I have sometimes thought that the figure of "Day" in the Medici Chapel gained by its incompleteness—that it was better than the "Night" upon the opposite side of the tomb because the sculptor's intention is perfectly obvious and yet the spectator's imagination is not stifled. There, like a fallen god, he lies, half embedded in his matrix of stone with a suggestion of mighty power, never so strongly felt in any other marble in this world. The lack of finish, the mystery, the uncertainty, help on the imagination. One may fancy, as many have done, that the figure symbolizes the loss of Florentine freedom, and that the grand captive, with his massive brow and sunken eyes, half-rises wearily to view the morning light shining for him in vain. And again one may imagine he is a new Prometheus bound to the rock; one of the Gigantes; or perhaps a conquered Titan lying along the hills of Tartarus in the drear twilight, brooding in melancholy silence over the loss of Olympus. To whatever the mind may conjure up regarding the figure, the element of reserved strength will lend assistance. Cut the captive from his bed of stone and the strength falls

short, lacking the foil of resistance; finish the marble and an existent fact precludes the possibility of wide imagination.

The great English master of art, how well he knew what to leave out! The lovers Lorenzo and Jessica are in the still, evening air, and with what consummate skill Shakespeare paints the landscape with that one suggestive line:

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank.

Not a word about the trees or grasses or ponds or meadows; not a word about the stillness of the night, the hushed winds, and the shining stars; but do you not see them all? Do they not rise up before your eyes as by magic? Your realist would have put us to sleep with dreary description of grass and groves and glittering dew-drops instead of the moonlight. And Shakespeare himself might have written a volume of description and still not roused us to his meaning so quickly as with that one suggestive line. The value of the sign in art, whether it be pictorial, sculptural, or literary, lies in its suggestive quality; and the "Sower" of Millet, the "Day" of Michael Angelo, and the moonlight of Shakespeare are merely so many suggestive signs.

JOHN C. VAN DYKE: *The Meaning of Pictures*. Used by permission of and arrangement with the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

## THE CENTRAL PROBLEM OF STYLE

**I**F I may roughly resume the substance of my argument in terms rather different from those I have actually employed, I will say that "Style is a quality of language which communicates precisely emotions or thoughts, or a system of emotions or thoughts, peculiar to the author. Where thought predominates, there the expression will be in prose; where emotion predominates, the expression will be indifferently in prose or poetry, except that in the case of overwhelming immediate personal emotion the tendency is to find expression in poetry. Style is perfect when the communication of the thought or emotion is exactly accomplished; its position in the scale of absolute greatness, however, will depend upon the comprehensiveness of the system of emotions and thoughts to which the reference is perceptible."

It is impossible to avoid ambiguities and vagueness in such a definition: the material does not admit of definition in the ordinary sense of the word. I hope, however, that I have avoided using any term that has not had some content at least given to it in the course of my previous lectures. There is, nevertheless, one phrase of which, I know, I cannot fairly say this.

The phrase is vital; everything depends upon it. There, if anywhere, is hidden the secret of the mystery.

I have spoken “of language which communicates precisely thoughts and emotions”; I have spent a good deal of time in trying to elucidate some of the various forms that emotions and thoughts may take in the author’s mind: and I have left without investigation, as though it were the most ordinary occurrence in the world, this activity of “precise communication.” Believe me, I did this without any intention of burking the issue, but simply because to postpone the crucial discussion seemed the only way of keeping a sense of proportion about it. For style wholly depends upon this precise communication; where it is not, style does not exist; yet the danger of trying to grapple with it immediately is that we are left with no criterion to distinguish between the excellences of style. It seems to me a fundamental fact that there is a hierarchy in literature, and therefore in literary style; any critical attempt which affects to ignore this fundamental fact (as a great deal of even the best recent literary criticism has done) is incomplete and unsatisfactory.

After all, you may feel that “the precise communication of emotion and thought” is really a simple matter. For some obscure reason, it sounds simple; and perhaps in the case of pure thought it is not so difficult. I suppose that Euclid, once he had conceived

the forty-seventh proposition of the first book, found it easy enough to write it out. The difficulty lay in conceiving the thing at all. But with this kind of communication of thoughts, or communication of this kind of thoughts, literature has very little to do. Sometimes it is necessary to the articulation of a great work of literature, as the logical argument is necessary to the structure of Plato's *Republic*; but regarded in and for itself it falls outside the scope of the literary art. I am aware that there is such a thing as style in a purely logical argument, and even more perceptibly in the solution of the more abstruse problems of mathematics—Lord Rayleigh's style was elegant, I am told, while Henri Poincaré's had the dazzling brilliance of a flash of lightning—but, having little logic and no mathematics, I am incompetent to discuss these things, so that even though I feel that a competent examination of them might help not a little to an understanding of literary style, they must perforce be left aside.

In literature there is no such thing as pure thought; in literature, thought is always the handmaid of emotion. Even in comedy and satire, where the interposition of thought is most constantly manifest, emotion is the driving impulse; but in these kinds the emotion is restricted, because it has a conventional basis. It is not the less real for that, of course, but it is of a peculiar kind, and needs to be mediated in a pe-

cular way. But the thought of which we are talking when we speak of it as predominant or subordinate in a work of literature has nothing to do with the pure thought of the logician, the scientist, or the mathematician. The essential quality of pure thought (as far as I understand it at all) is that it should lend itself to complete expression by symbols which have a constant and invariable value. Words, as we all know, are not symbols of this kind; they are inconstant and variable; and I believe that it is rapidly coming to be accepted that the metaphysician who uses ordinary words is merely a bad poet, or a good one. Plato and Spinoza were good poets; Hegel a bad one.

The thought that plays a part in literature is systematized emotion, emotion become habitual till it attains the dignity of conviction. The "fundamental brain-work" of a great play or a great novel is not performed by the reason, pure or practical; even the transcendental essayist is merely engaged in trying to get his emotions on to paper. The most austere psychological analyst, even one who, like Stendhal, really imagined he was exercising *la logique*, is only attempting to get some order into his own instinctive reactions. In one way or another the whole of literature consists in this communication of emotion. How is it done? Let us see what we can do with a simple instance.

At the moment I am writing these words, I am distinctly depressed. I have left the composition of these lectures too long, and I am pressed for time; I am very doubtful whether I shall be able to systematize my emotions. The place where I am living is supposed to be in perpetual sunshine. That is the only reason for living there. The wind is howling; the sky is overcast; and there has not been a really fine day for a fortnight. . . .

I could have gone on for a page or two in this way, and I doubt very much whether I should have given any more definite idea of my emotional state at the moment I wrote those words than I have already done. But what does my reader know of it really? He knows some of the circumstances; by exercising his imagination he can evoke in himself an emotional condition that may be similar to mine; but there is no telling. I have not communicated my emotion to him, for to communicate an emotion means, in fact, to impose an emotion. To do this, I have to find some symbol which will evoke in him an emotional reaction as nearly as possible identical with the emotion I am feeling. Do not mistake me when I say symbol; I use the word because I cannot think of a better at the moment; I mean to include in it any device of expression that is not merely descriptive. The method I used in those few lines was to recapitulate the circumstances, my assumption be-

ing that like conditions will produce like effects. But on both sides there is unfortunately an unknown quantity: my temperament is an *x*, my reader's is a *y*. The product that results from the combination of those given circumstances with *x* may be, probably will be, very different from the result of their combination with *y*. There are only two guarantees that the emotional effects will be approximately the same: the one, that there is a general average of temperament on which similar conditions will produce similar effects; the other, the general limitation of the emotion by the words: "I am depressed." Both are vague; both are risky. The mesh of my net, in fact, has been made so wide that it is all Lombard Street to a china orange that the particularity of the emotion is lost.

This, I think, is the central problem of style, as it presents itself to the writer. The question is, how shall he compel others to feel the particularity of his emotion? In this example the emotion is quite simple and quite personal; there is nothing profound or comprehensive about it: we are discussing a most elementary case. But the same principle is involved, the same problem is to be solved in the most complicated cases of all, where the writer's emotions have been systematized into a self-consistent whole, and are being projected on to an appropriate plot that has been formed in his mind. Each separate emotion has to be conveyed in its particularity.

The only definition of style I know which formulates the problem as it presents itself to the writer is that of Henri Beyle (Stendhal), which I have already quoted. It may be said, "Is not that fact itself rather suspicious—only one?" I reply, "Not at all." The fact is that writers, when they deliver themselves upon the subject of style, are hardly ever grappling with the process of their own activity. The conception of style, itself, is a little alien to the mind of the creative writer; it is not a term which he uses naturally. He thinks to himself in a curious, analogical language; he asks himself, "Is this alive?"; he says, "I think that's *solid*"; or he wonders, "Does that make its effect?" Even for a writer who is consciously and deliberately preoccupied with the question of style, there is something awkward and unnatural in confronting his problem under that name. It is as though he had to put on his dress-clothes to talk about a job he does habitually in his oldest jacket. So it is that when writers make pronouncements on, and give definitions of, style, they are usually moved to do so by some particularly nauseating critical clap-trap that is going the rounds at the time. Some harmless and well-meaning lady at a dinner party repeats something she has read (she has forgotten where) to the effect that Mr. X has a beautiful style. The rather reticent professional writer at her side tries to swallow his indignation and fails: it goes to his head: his cheeks flush a bright

pink. "Style," he says, "is the man himself." It may have been meant as a withering insult to Mr. X; it may have been intended as a profession of faith: no one knows exactly, not even the author.

Most of the famous statements on style belong to this kind; they are protests. Their obvious bearing is negative, though their implications are positive. Generally they mean, "Don't talk to me about style: there ain't no sich person. There's good writing and there's bad writing." To attempt to separate the element of style in good writing—well, remember *The Tale of a Tub*: "Last week I saw a woman flayed, and you will hardly believe how much it altered her person for the worse." The fact is that nine times out of ten, when a serious author makes use of the word Style, he is trying, as thousands of his tribe have tried before, to correct the heresies of the critics: style is not an isolable quality of writing; it is writing itself. And, of course, the author is right.

The only thing to do is to drop the word altogether—I am afraid it has a trick of disappearing from the surface of these lectures—and turn on the writer, and ask him: "What is good writing?" The odds are heavy that he will think gloomily for a minute or two, then wave his hands, and let loose a flood of discourse in which you will perceive—"rari nantes in gurgite vasto"—phrases of the kind I have described. "Well, it has to be solid . . . alive . . . economical

. . . you must get your effect across." Each of these phrases is, if you can interpret it, extremely valuable; each has a whole semi-conscious theory of artistic creation behind it; but their significance is not on the surface. And it is in the nature of things very seldom that you find a writer whose intelligence is sufficiently cool, or whose power of analysis steady enough, for him to formulate his meaning in terms that are at all precise. Generally you have to be content with casual *obiter dicta*, little examples that linger much longer in the memory than you would have expected of them; as when Anton Tchehov wrote to a writer friend of his who had sent him a story for his opinion: "Cut out all those pages about the moonlight, and give us instead what you feel about it—the reflection of the moon in a piece of broken bottle"; or when Dostoevsky, in a similar case, said to a writer who had described the throwing of pennies to an organ man in the street below, "I want to hear that penny *hopping and chinking*."

Stendhal is the only writer I know who formulated the general proposition of which these are particular instances; and Stendhal was a very peculiar writer indeed. He wrote two of the greatest of all French novels; yet his style—in the most familiar sense of the word—was non-existent. It is absolutely bare, and in many ways astonishingly careless; for instance, he even dared to write that a lady sent her lover

*une lettre infinie.* He professed—and I do not think it was a mystification—to spend his mornings studying the Code Napoléon as a model of clear expression; that same Code Napoléon which was to send young Flaubert into a delirium of rage—“quelque chose d'aussi sec, d'aussi dur, d'aussi puant et platetement bourgeois que les bancs de bois de l'école où on va s'endurcir les fesses à en entendre l'explication.” Yet, with an instrument shaped after this pattern, Stendhal wrote two novels which belong at least to the same class as *Madame Bovary*. I do not think that any one has ever more resolutely reduced the art of writing to essentials than Stendhal. He had an analytical and critical mind; there was some reason to expect that he would give us the best of all the definitions of style. He did so. Naturally, since Stendhal was the author, it reads *like* a definition. He says in *Racine et Shakespeare*: “Le style est ceci: Ajouter à une pensée donnée toutes les circonstances propres à produire tout l'effet que doit produire cette pensée.” “Style is this: to add to a given thought all the circumstances fitted to produce the whole effect that the thought ought to produce.”

The first thing to remember in examining this definition is that “thought” (as I have said before) does not really mean “thought”; it is a general term to cover intuitions, convictions, perceptions, and their accompanying emotions before they have undergone

the process of artistic expression or ejection. A man like Stendhal, brought up in the French sensationalist philosophy of the late eighteenth century, lumps them all together under the name of thoughts. For instance, the feeling of depression in my simple instance of the practical problem of style, cannot by any courtesy be called a thought; but Stendhal means such things as these; Tchehov's vision of the moonlight, Dostoevsky's of the sounding penny—these are "thoughts." The second point is in the phrase, "the whole effect which the thought ought to produce." A more truly accurate translation, I think, would be: "the whole effect which the thought is intended to produce." At all events, the French hovers between the two meanings. It may occur to some one that a perception, an emotion, a thought naturally will produce the effect it ought, or is intended to, produce; it may seem that it cannot help itself. Express your thought, and it is bound to produce its proper effect. It depends upon what is meant by expression. To return to my crude example: when I wrote "I am depressed," I may fairly claim to have "expressed" my thought; but we all know it does not produce its effect. Ah, but it has to be expressed *precisely*. But mark what happened when I began to try to express it precisely; I did exactly what Stendhal tells me to do. I began to add circumstances. I knew instinctively that I could not

give my feeling any more precise *definition*: depression is an ultimate or primary conception in psychology. To communicate the particular quality of my depression, I simply had to try to enable my reader to recreate it for himself.

Now, perhaps, if I were to persevere in that road, I might, after a few pages of laborious analysis, succeed in putting before him enough of the attendant circumstances, enough details of my temperament and environment, for him to appreciate my emotional condition fairly exactly. But life is short, and so is his forbearance; my narrative—for we will suppose that I am at the beginning of a narrative—hangs fire. The proportion will be absolutely lost. The effect of the whole thought, of which this particular emotional incident is only a tiny fragment, would be ruined. The method of simple enumeration may possibly do if I am writing sentimental autobiography (which Heaven forbid!), but it certainly will not do for anything else. The exhaustive method may produce a sort of style, but it is style in deliquescence. I may say that Stendhal's own style was highly concentrated: one might almost call it a tabloid style.

No, the circumstances I have to look for must be somehow charged with the maximum of significance; they must be compact. This emotion has its place in my supposed narrative, but it must not exceed its

place: I must on no account shoot beyond my mark—all the effect the thought ought to produce—no less and no more. "Selection," murmurs the critic. Oh, bother "selection"; show me what to select, and how. Besides, Stendhal, who had at least the advantage of having written a couple of masterpieces, says "Add." Ah, but you have to select what you will add. Select from what? From among the nine hundred and ninety-nine attendant circumstances my laborious analysis would have provided me with. I cannot even wait to review them all; I should lose all contact with the emotion which I trust is to inspire my narrative as a whole. Selection is a broken reed; it is a stout staff only in the belief of those critics who imagine that style is produced by a painful re-polishing of the surface. We know that it is something more intimate and vital than that.

I trust to my mother wit, and try to write my opening paragraph again:

"I am depressed; depressed by the prospect of crowding the work of a year into three weeks; by living sunless in a house and town that were built only for sunshine. A cold wind prowls round the windows. The peach-tree in the garden came into flower too soon; the cold and the wind have stripped it. I too have been premature."

Please do not imagine that I have the hardihood to present you with that as an achievement of style. The

making of specimens to order is bound to be unsatisfactory; but I can see no better way of reducing vagueness to a minimum.

In technical language, the second redaction differs from the first by having been made "more solid." It has been pulled together. The period has been compressed and given a little more shape. The effort has also been made to give it a little more life. The wind no longer "howls," it "prowls"; which, at any rate, gives one a better idea of the particular beastliness of the wind with which I was afflicted. And I have tried to use the fate of my peach-tree as a sort of symbol of my own mental condition; I have, if you like, "selected" that from the host of attendant circumstances, though I assure you I did nothing of the kind. The peach-tree seemed to fit my case pretty well; it simply rose up before my mind when I determined to make the attempt to convey the particular quality of my feeling. I was so satisfied with the likeness that I practically identified myself with the tree, and so slipped more or less unconsciously into a metaphor to clinch my period.

From this hot-house specimen of the process of writing one may derive some idea of what Stendhal meant by "adding to a given thought all the circumstances fitted to produce the whole effect the thought is intended to produce." Incidentally, this adding of circumstances has involved the adding of at least two

metaphors. "The wind howls" was once a metaphor; but it is so no longer, it has passed into current speech. "The wind prowls" is a metaphor; but it was not deliberately introduced as one. I was simply in search of a more exactly descriptive word. Precisely the same thing happened with "I have been premature." The vision of the tree as typical of the desolating and depressing weather suggested the use of "premature" as a word more exactly descriptive of my condition than "depressed," and by the chance it happened that I restored to a word whose metaphorical significance had been lost, its metaphorical freshness. "Premature" had a picture to give it back its meaning.

I shall return to the subject of metaphor; but, as it is in its natural place here, I should like to emphasize what I previously said in protest against the conception that metaphor is in any useful sense of the word an ornament. A metaphor is the result of the search for a precise epithet. It is no more ornamental than a man's Christian name. For most of the things whose quality a writer wishes to convey there are no precise epithets, simply because he is always engaged in discovering their qualities, and, like the chemist, has to invent names for the elements he discovers. Moreover, I suppose, three-quarters of the epithets we have are old metaphors. Try to be precise, and you are bound to be metaphorical; you simply cannot help

establishing affinities between all the provinces of the animate and inanimate world: for the volatile essence you are trying to fix is quality, and in that effort you will inevitably find yourself ransacking heaven and earth for a similitude. That is the simple truth which underlies the Aristotelian dictum on the importance of metaphor; so long, moreover, as we remember that metaphor is essential to precision of language, we shall not be tempted to abuse it. Where a metaphor adds nothing to the precision with which a thought is expressed, then it is unnecessary and to be sacrificed without compunction.

Let us return to our definition. It is, I hope, by now apparent, that the circumstances which a writer must add to his thought to make it completely effective are descriptive and precise, but in a peculiar, and not very obvious way; that the descriptive precision at which he aims is not so much expository as creative. He is not really defining, that is, enabling you to think, but compelling you to feel, in a certain way. If he is a very deliberate artist he will employ all kinds of resources in his effort; he will, for instance, endeavour to give his sentences or his verses a rhythm that will co-operate in and intensify the feeling he is trying to produce. There are some rather hackneyed examples of this device—"The murmuring of innumerable bees," "The moan of doves in immemorial

elms." Honestly, I don't think much of them. They seem to me clumsy, not very subtle, or very effective. But here is one from Shakespeare that is masterly:

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,  
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not:  
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,  
That if I then had waked after long sleep,  
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming  
The clouds methought would open and show riches  
Ready to drop on me, that when I wak'd  
I cried to dream again.

The musical effect of the dominant falling rhythm, caused by the hypermetrical syllable, is perfect: the complete effect of the thought is produced, and with the more astonishing success, because this little speech of Caliban's is suddenly flung into the drunken scene between Stephano and Trinculo. It is a simpler case of the complex harmony of contrast which we found in *Antony and Cleopatra*. A still more striking example from Shakespeare—more striking because the contrast is achieved completely in two lines—occurs at the end of *Hamlet*:

Absent thee from felicity awhile,  
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain  
To tell my story.

As the now forgotten Daniel Webb pointed out in the middle of the eighteenth century, it is impossible to speak the second line distinctly without drawing one's breath in pain. Coming from the lips of the dying Hamlet, and following the perfectly liquid "Absent thee from felicity awhile," its effect is doubled; it is the subtle device of a poetic and dramatic genius.

But these devices—an inadequate name for them—though they can be used with superb effect by the masters, are subsidiary. Style does not depend upon them, though it is perfected by them; and in the hands of writers beneath the rank of masters they are very dangerous tools indeed. How many ambitious writers of prose and poetry do we see drowning their effect under the waves of a monotonous and deliberate rhythm? In order that rhythmic effects should be successful they must be differentiated with certainty; and to manage contrasts of rhythm—with out contrast there is no differentiation—with so much subtlety that they will remain subordinate to the intellectual suggestion of the words, is the most delicate work imaginable. It is so easy to allow the sound of a phrase to overpower the sense, even when the sense is fairly clear; for when a strong, decided rhythmical movement is running in one's head, it is very hard not to submit to its influence, and blunt the edge of one's phrase by continually replacing the less by the more

sonorous word. The emotional suggestion of a word does not primarily reside in its sound, but much rather in the imagery and literary associations it evokes; and in the vast majority of those words which can be said to have an independent musical value, the musical suggestion is at odds with the meaning. When the musical suggestion is allowed to predominate, decadence of style has begun. I think you will find a great many examples of this sacrifice of the true creativeness of language in Swinburne, and not a few in that much, and within limits rightly, admired modern master, Mr. Conrad.

“Distinctness,” says Keats, “should be the poet’s luxury.” The essential quality of good writing is precision; that must be kept at its maximum, and the writer who sacrifices one per cent. of precision for a gain of one hundred per cent. in music is on the downward path. After all, it is only reasonable that it should be so. Every art has its peculiar qualities; an artist in language must do everything in his power to realize the unique possibilities of that medium before he summons in the aid of another medium. Music is a superb and self-sufficient art; its unique possibilities are utterly beyond the range of spoken language. The writer who allows himself to be distracted by the musical possibilities of language is like the dog who dropped the bone for the watery shadow.

On the other hand, just as the author must abstain

from following after the mirage of an impossible musical perfection, he must not allow himself to be corrupted by trying to emulate the art of painting. If anything is more wearisome than a long passage of so-called musical prose or poetry, it is a long passage of laborious pictorial description: and the two heresies are about equally prevalent.

The difficulty of trying to expose the pictorial heresy is this. It is true that a most valuable quality—an essential quality—of creative writing is something which may be called “concreteness.” The writer, in his effort after precision, as we have seen, is continually looking for similitudes in other spheres of existence for the thing that he is describing; he is constantly giving as it were a physical turn to the spiritual, and the general effort of metaphor is in this direction. Take for instance, two beautiful Shakespearean metaphors describing that most elusive activity of the mind, thinking in silence. First, the sonnet:

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up the memory of things past.

Then, the Queen’s description of Hamlet:

Anon, as patient as the female dove  
When that her golden couplet are disclosed,  
His silence will sit drooping.

In each of these a concrete image is evoked to give definition to the silent thought. There is a crystallization, but it stops as it were half-way. The image is made to rise not before the vision but the imagination. You do not *see* silent thought sitting on the bench; you do not *see* silence in the shape of the drooping dove. The images are bathed in the virtue of the immaterial condition they define. What has happened is not what seemed at first—that the spiritual has been brought down to the physical—but the physical has been taken up to the spiritual. The lofty but vague reality of the spiritual world has been suddenly enriched by something of the infinite, concrete variety of the material world.

This “crystallization” is central to the effort after precision; it made its appearance, naturally and inevitably, in that somewhat artificial example of my own invention. The forms in which it appears are manifold: sometimes in metaphor, sometimes in a genuine image which we are intended to visualize, as when, at the end of the voyage to Lilliput, Gulliver relates that the king gave him “his picture at full length, which I immediately put into one of my gloves to keep it from being hurt”—thus Swift sends us away from Lilliput with a perfectly precise notion of the size of the inhabitants and of Gulliver. Again, you have it in that recommendation of Tchehov’s which I quoted, that his friend should “cut out all

those pages about the moonlight and give us what you really feel about it—the reflection in a piece of broken bottle"; you get it in Baudelaire's phrase: "ces affreuses nuits qui compriment le cœur comme un papier qu'on froisse"; you get it, in one form or another, in all good writing that is creative, because it is the chief of those circumstances which have to be added to a thought in order that it may be completely effective.

In whatever form it occurs, whether metaphor, image, or significant detail, it appears first as a kind of solidification. And writers, in their anxiety to emphasize the supreme importance of this element in a living style, have often been inclined to say that a writer must be "plastic." The phrase sometimes occurs in Flaubert's letters, and Flaubert has had, perhaps, a greater influence than any other single person on the ideas of writers during the last thirty years; it occurs in the letter which Tchekhov wrote to Gorky, when that writer first appeared: "You are an artist, you feel superbly, you are plastic; that is, when you describe a thing you see it and touch it with your hands: that is real style." Though we know what these two writers mean when they speak of being plastic, that is, possessing this power of imaginative "crystallization," the effect of the phrase has been unfortunate; for it needs only a slight distortion to become positively misleading. And a great many people have been misled.

There have been those who have thought that the best way to be "plastic" is for the poet actually to describe works of plastic art: quite a number of the French Parnassians suffered under that hallucination. There have been others who have imagined that they could become plastic by imitating what they (mistakenly) believed to be the process of the plastic artist, the laborious transcription of all the detail seen by the eye: quite a number of Realists have suffered under that hallucination. . . .

For the endeavour to reduce the gift of style to the faculty of visualization is really a characteristic French attempt after a simple hypothesis to explain very complicated facts. It seems to me that the truth is not so much that an author must himself possess a great power of visualization—even where his gift is mainly descriptive—as that he must possess the power of making his readers see things on occasion. I should have thought that those faculties were very different. If anything, I should say that a writer would be embarrassed by an exceedingly exact visual memory. For a visual memory is, in the nature of things, undiscriminating, and what the descriptive writer has to do is to record some salient feature of what he has seen, which will recreate in the mind of his reader something akin to his own vivid emotional impression.

Moreover, from our brief consideration of the na-

ture of metaphor, it seems fairly clear that the precise visual image plays a very small part in it. What happens, I think, is that a perceived quality in one kind of existence is transferred to define a quality in another kind of existence. To hark back to our examples from Shakespeare, there is no precise visual image of the "sessions," no definite picture even of "the drooping dove" evoked; there is an evocation of just so much visual background as will enable us to feel the quality that is being transferred.

What I think we may say is that a great creative writer must have a vast store of these perceptions of quality upon which to draw at will. The more he has, the more precise will his writing be; the more exactly will he be able to communicate the quality of his own emotion, and to arouse a kindred emotion in his readers. In other words, it is necessary, in order that a writer should become a writer of the first rank, that his capacity for sensuous experience of every kind should be practically unlimited. But this is not because his greatness as a writer directly depends upon the range of that experience. His emotional experience, refined into a system of emotional conviction, is of a different kind from sensuous experience; the apprehension of the quality of life as a whole, the power to discern the universal in the particular, and to make the particular a symbol of the universal,

which is the distinctive mark of the great writer and is apparent in all great style, is derived not from sensuous perceptions but from emotional contemplation. But sensuous perceptions are necessary for the complete expression of this contemplative experience. The great writer has to carry the articulation of the material world into the world of the spirit; he has to define the indefinable. This is the truth expressed in the familiar lines of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, which deserve to be more closely examined than they usually are. Shakespeare did not often speak of his art: when he did, it was to the point:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And, as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.

For this task, which Science and Logic alike pronounce impossible, the writer needs an accumulation of vivid sensuous experiences, of perceived qualities with their little fragments of context. This is the magical language of literature with which the poet, in prose or verse, utters secrets which the language of Logic and Science and the converse of everyday were never designed to bear.

Poetry alone can tell her dreams,  
With the fine spell of words alone can save  
Imagination from the sable chain  
And dumb enchantment.

But these words are not inherited, neither can they be learnt. Every work of enduring literature is not so much a triumph of language as a victory over language: a sudden injection of life-giving perceptions into a vocabulary that is, but for the energy of the creative writer, perpetually on the verge of exhaustion.

J. M. MURRY: *The Problem of Style*. Used by permission of and arrangement with Mr. Murry and the publishers, The Oxford University Press.

## VARIETY

SOMEONE, after detailing an elaborate recipe for a salad, wound up the enumeration of ingredients and quantities with the advice to "open the window and throw it all away." This advice might be applied to the . . . enumeration of the laws of Style, unless these were supplemented by the important law of Variety. A style which rigidly interpreted the precepts of economy, simplicity, sequence, and climax, which rejected all superfluous words and redundant ornaments, adopted the easiest and most logical arrangement, and closed every sentence and every paragraph with a climax, might be a very perfect bit of mosaic, but would want the glow and movement of a living mind. Monotony would settle on it like a paralyzing frost. A series of sentences in which every phrase was a distinct thought, would no more serve as pabulum for the mind, than portable soup freed from all the fibrous tissues of meat and vegetable would serve as food for the body. Animals perish from hunger in the presence of pure albumen; and minds would lapse into idiocy in the presence of unadulterated thought. But without invoking extreme

cases, let us simply remember the psychological fact that it is as easy for sentences to be too compact as for food to be too concentrated; and that many a happy negligence, which to microscopic criticism may appear defective, will be the means of giving clearness and grace to a style. Of course the indolent indulgence in this laxity robs style of all grace and power. But monotony in the structure of sentences, monotony of cadence, monotony of climax, monotony anywhere, necessarily defeats the very aim and end of style; it calls attention to the manner; it blunts the sensibilities; it renders excellences odious.

“Beauty deprived of its proper foils and adjuncts ceases to be enjoyed as beauty, just as light deprived of all shadow ceases to be enjoyed as light. A white canvas cannot produce an effect of sunshine; the painter must darken it in some places before he can make it look luminous in others; nor can an uninterrupted succession of beauty produce the true effect of beauty; it must be foiled by inferiority before its own power can be developed. Nature has for the most part mingled her inferior and noble elements as she mingles sunshine with shade, giving due use and influence to both, and the painter who chooses to remove the shadow, perishes in the burning desert he has created. The truly high and beautiful art of Angelico is continually refreshed and strengthened by his frank portraiture of the most ordinary features

of his brother monks and of the recorded peculiarities of ungainly sanctity; but the modern German and Raphaelesque schools lose all honor and nobleness in barber-like admiration of handsome faces, and have, in fact, no real faith except in straight noses, and curled hair. Paul Veronese opposes the dwarf to the soldier, and the negress to the queen; Shakespeare places Caliban beside Miranda, and Autolycus beside Perdita; but the vulgar idealist withdraws his beauty to the safety of the saloon, and his innocence to the seclusion of the cloister; he pretends that he does this in delicacy of choice and purity of sentiment, while in truth he has neither courage to front the monster, nor wit enough to furnish the knave."

And how is Variety to be secured? The plan is simple, but like many other simple plans, is not without difficulty. It is for the writer to obey the great cardinal principle of Sincerity, and be brave enough to express himself in his own way, following the moods of his own mind, rather than endeavoring to catch the accents of another, or to adapt himself to some standard of taste. No man really thinks and feels monotonously. If he is monotonous in his manner of setting forth his thoughts and feelings, that is either because he has not learned the art of writing, or because he is more or less consciously imitating the manner of others. The subtle play of thought will give movement and life to his style if he do not clog

it with critical superstitions. I do not say that it will give him grace and power; I do not say that relying on perfect sincerity will make him a fine writer, because sincerity will not give talent; but I say that sincerity will give him all the power that is possible to him, and will secure him the inestimable excellence of Variety.

G. H. LEWES: *Principles of Success in Literature.*

## HARD WORDS

I SHOULD likewise have been glad if you had applied yourself a little more to the study of the English language than I fear you have done; the neglect whereof is one of the most general defects among the scholars of this kingdom, who seem not to have the least conception of a style, but run on in a flat kind of phraseology, often mingled with barbarous terms and expressions peculiar to the nation. Neither do I perceive that any person either finds or acknowledges his wants upon this head, or in the least desires to have them supplied. Proper words in proper places make the true definition of a style. But this would require too ample a disquisition to be now dwelt on; however, I shall venture to name one or two faults which are easy to be remedied with a very small portion of abilities.

The first is the frequent use of obscure terms, which by the women are called hard words, and by the better sort of vulgar, fine language; than which I do not know a more universal, inexcusable, and unnecessary mistake among the clergy of all distinctions, but especially the younger practitioners. I have been

curious enough to take a list of several hundred words in a sermon of a new beginner, which not one of his hearers among a hundred could possibly understand; neither can I easily call to mind any clergyman of my own acquaintance who is wholly exempt from this error, although many of them agree with me in the dislike of the thing. But I am apt to put myself in the place of the vulgar, and think many words difficult or obscure, which they will not allow to be so, because those words are obvious to scholars. I believe the method observed by the famous Lord Falkland in some of his writings would not be an ill one for young divines. I was assured by an old person of quality who knew him well, that when he doubted whether a word was perfectly intelligible or no he used to consult one of his lady's chambermaids (not the waiting-woman, because it was possible she might be conversant in romances), and by her judgment was guided whether to receive or reject it. And if that great person thought such a caution necessary in treatises offered to the learned world, it will be sure at least as proper in sermons, where the meanest hearer is supposed to be concerned, and where very often a lady's chambermaid may be allowed to equal half the congregation both as to quality and understanding. But I know not how it comes to pass that professors in most arts and sciences are generally the worst qualified to explain their meanings to those who are

not of their tribe: a common farmer shall make you understand in three words that his foot is out of joint, or his collar-bone broken, where a surgeon, after a hundred terms of art, if you are not a scholar, shall leave you to seek. It is frequently the same case in law, physic, and even many of the meaner arts. . . .

DEAN SWIFT: *Letter to a Young Clergyman.*

## ON JARGON

I REMEMBER to have heard somewhere of a religious body in the United States of America which had reason to suspect one of its churches of accepting spiritual consolation from a coloured preacher—an offence against the laws of the Synod—and despatched a Disciplinary Committee with power to act; and of the Committee's returning to report itself unable to take any action under its terms of reference, for that while a person undoubtedly coloured had undoubtedly occupied the pulpit and had audibly spoken from it in the Committee's presence, the performance could be brought within no definition of preaching known or discoverable. So it is with that infirmity of speech—that flux, that determination of words to the mouth, or to the pen,—which, though it be familiar to you in parliamentary debates, in newspapers, and as the staple language of Blue Books, Committees, Official Reports, I take leave to introduce to you as prose which is not prose and under its real name of Jargon.

You must not confuse this Jargon with what is called Journalese. The two overlap, indeed, and have a knack of assimilating each other's vices. But Jargon

finds, maybe, the most of its votaries among good douce people who have never written to or for a newspaper in their life, who would never talk of "adverse climatic conditions" when they mean "bad weather"; who have never trifled with verbs such as "obsess," "recrudesce," "envisage," "adumbrate," or with phrases such as "the psychological moment," "the true inwardness," "it gives furiously to think." It dallies with Latinity—"sub silentio," "de die in diem," "cui bono?" (always in the sense, unsuspected by Cicero, of "What is the profit?")—but not for the sake of style. Your journalist at the worst is an artist in his way; he daubs paint of this kind upon the lily with a professional zeal; the more flagrant (or, to use his own word, arresting) the pigment, the happier is his soul. Like the Babu he is trying all the while to embellish our poor language, to make it more floriferous, more poetical—like the Babu for example who, reporting his mother's death, wrote, "Regret to inform you, the hand that rocked the cradle has kicked the bucket."

*There* is metaphor; *there* is ornament; *there* is a sense of poetry, though as yet groping in a world unrealised. No such gusto marks—no such zeal, artistic or professional, animates—the practitioners of Jargon, who are, most of them (I repeat), douce respectable persons. Caution is its father; the instinct to save everything and especially trouble; its mother,

Indolence. It looks precise, but is not. It is, in these times, *safe*: a thousand men have said it before and not one to your knowledge had been prosecuted for it. And so, like respectability in Chicago, Jargon stalks unchecked in our midst. It is becoming the language of Parliament; it has become the medium through which Boards of Government, County Councils, Syndicates, Committees, Commercial Firms, express the processes as well as the conclusions of their thought and so voice the reason of their being.

Has a Minister to say "No" in the House of Commons? Some men are constitutionally incapable of saying no; but the Minister conveys it thus: "The answer to the question is in the negative." That means "no." Can you discover it to mean anything less, or anything more except that the speaker is a pompous person?—which was no part of the information demanded.

That is Jargon, and it happens to be accurate. But as a rule Jargon is by no means accurate, its method being to walk circumspectly around its target; and its faith, that having done so it has either hit the bull's-eye or at least achieved something equivalent, and safer.

Thus the clerk of a Board of Guardians will minute that—

In the case of John Jenkins deceased the coffin provided was of the usual character.

Now this is not accurate. "In the case of John Jenkins deceased," for whom a coffin was supplied, it is wholly superfluous to tell us that he is deceased. But actually John Jenkins never had more than one case, and that was the coffin. The clerk says he had two,—a coffin in a case; but I suspect the clerk to be mistaken, and I am sure he errs in telling us that the coffin was of the usual character; for coffins have no character, usual or unusual.

For another example (I shall not tell you whence derived)—

In the case of every candidate who is placed in the first class [So you see the lucky fellow gets a case as well as a first-class. He might be a stuffed animal: perhaps he is]—In the case of every candidate who is placed in the first class the class-list will show by some convenient mark (1) the Section or Sections for proficiency in which he is placed in the first class and (2) the Section or Sections (if any) in which he has passed with special distinction.

"The Section or Sections (if any)"—But how, if they are not any, could they be indicated by a mark however convenient?

The Examiners will have regard to the style and method of the candidate's answers, and will give credit for excellence in *these respects*.

Have you begun to detect the two main vices of Jargon? The first is that it uses circumlocution rather

than short straight speech. It says: "In the case of John Jenkins deceased, the coffin" when it means "John Jenkins's coffin"; and its yea is not yea, neither is its nay nay; but its answer is in the affirmative or in the negative, as the foolish and superfluous "case" may be. The second vice is that it habitually chooses vague woolly abstract nouns rather than concrete ones. I shall have something to say by-and-by about the concrete noun, and how you should ever be struggling for it whether in prose or in verse. For the moment I content myself with advising you, if you would write masculine English, never to forget the old tag of your Latin Grammar—

Masculine will only be  
Things that you can touch and see.

But since these lectures are meant to be a course in First Aid to writing, I will content myself with one or two extremely rough rules; yet I shall be disappointed if you do not find them serviceable.

The first is: Whenever in your reading you come across one of these words, *case*, *instance*, *character*, *nature*, *condition*, *persuasion*, *degree*—whenever in writing your pen betrays you to one or another of them—pull yourself up and take thought. If it be "case" (I choose it as Jargon's dearest child—"in Heaven yclept Metonomy") turn to the dictionary, if you will, and seek out what meaning can be de-

rived from *casus*, its Latin ancestor; then try how, with a little trouble, you can extricate yourself from that case. The odds are, you will feel like a butterfly who has discarded his chrysalis.

Here are some specimens to try your hand on:

(1) All those tears which inundated Lord Hugh Cecil's head were dry in the case of Mr. Harold Cox.

Poor Mr. Cox! left gasping in his aquarium!

(2) [From a cigar-merchant.] In any case, let us send you a case on approval.

(3) It is contended that Consols have fallen in consequence: but such is by no means the case.

“*Such*,” by the way, is another spoilt child of Jargon, especially in Committee’s Rules—“Co-opted members may be eligible as such; such members to continue to serve for such time as”—and so on.

(4) Even in the purely Celtic areas only in two or three cases do the Bishops bear Celtic names.

For “cases” read “dioceses.”

*Instance.* In most instances the players were below their form.

But what were they playing at? Instances?

*Character—Nature.* There can be no doubt that the accident was caused through the dangerous nature of the

spot, the hidden character of the by-road, and the utter absence of any warning or danger signal.

Mark the foggy wording of it all! And yet the man hit something and broke his neck! Contrast that explanation with the verdict of a coroner's jury in the west of England on a drowned postman: "We find that deceased met his death by an act of God, caused by sudden overflowing of the river Walkham and helped out by the scandalous neglect of the way-wardens."

The Aintree course is notoriously of a trying nature.

On account of its light character, purity, and age, Usher's whiskey is a whiskey that will agree with you.

*Order.* The mésalliance was of a pronounced order.

*Condition.* He was conveyed to his place of residence in an intoxicated condition.

"He was carried home drunk."

*Quality and Section.* Mr. —, exhibiting no less than five works, all of a superior quality, figures prominently in the oil section.

—This was written of an exhibition of pictures.

*Degree.* A singular degree of rarity prevails in the earlier editions of this romance.

That is Jargon. In prose it runs simply "The earlier editions of this romance are rare"—or "are

very rare”—or even (if you believe what I take leave to doubt), “are singularly rare”; which should mean that they are rarer than the editions of any other work in the world.

Now what I ask you to consider about these quotations is that in each the writer was using Jargon to shirk prose, palming off periphrases upon us when with a little trouble he could have gone straight to the point. “A singular degree of rarity prevails,” “the accident was caused through the dangerous nature of the spot,” “but such is by no means the case.” We may not be capable of much; but we can all write better than that, if we take a little trouble. In place of, “the Aintree course is of a trying nature” we can surely say “Aintree is a trying course” or “the Aintree course is a trying one”—just that and nothing more.

Next, having trained yourself to keep a lookout for these worst offenders (and you will be surprised to find how quickly you get into the way of it), proceed to push your suspicions out among the whole cloudy host of abstract terms. “How excellent a thing is sleep,” sighed Sancho Panza; “it wraps a man round like a cloak”—an excellent example, by the way, of how to say a thing concretely; a Jargoneer would have said that “among the beneficent qualities of sleep its capacity for withdrawing the human consciousness from the contemplation of immediate circumstances

may perhaps be accounted not the least remarkable." How vile a thing—shall we say—is the abstract noun! It wraps a man's thoughts round like cotton wool.

Here is a pretty little nest of specimens, found in *The Times* newspaper by Messrs. H. W. and F. G. Fowler, authors of that capital little book *The King's English*:

One of the most important reforms mentioned in the rescript is the unification of the organization of judicial institutions and the guarantee for all the tribunals of the independence necessary for securing to all classes of the community equality before the law.

I do not dwell on the cacophony; but, to convey a straightforward piece of news, might not the editor of *The Times* as well employ a man to write:

One of the most important reforms is that of the Courts, which need a uniform system and to be made independent. In this way only can men be assured that all are equal before the law.

I think he might. . . .

Let us turn to another trick of jargon; the trick of Elegant Variation, so rampant in the sporting press that there, without needing to attend these lectures, the undergraduate detects it for laughter:—

Hayward and C. B. Fry now faced the bowling, which apparently had no terrors for the Surrey crack. The old Oxonian, however, took some time in settling to work. . . .

Yes, you all recognise it and laugh at it. But why do you practise it in your essays? An undergraduate brings me an essay on Byron. In an essay on Byron, Byron is (or ought to be) mentioned many times. I expect, nay exact, that Byron shall be mentioned again and again. But my undergraduate has a blushing sense that to call Byron Byron twice on one page is indelicate. So Byron, after starting bravely as Byron, in the second sentence turns into "that great but unequal poet" and thenceforward I have as much trouble with Byron as ever Telemachus with Proteus to hold and pin him back to his proper self. Halfway down the page he becomes "the gloomy master of Newstead"; overleaf he is reincarnated into "the meteoric darling of society"; and so proceeds through successive avatars—"this arch-rebel," "the author of *Childe Harold*," "the apostle of scorn," "the ex-Harrovia, proud, but abnormally sensitive of his club-foot," "the martyr of Missolonghi," "the pageant-monger of a bleeding heart." Now this again is jargon. It does not, as most jargon does, come of laziness; but it comes of timidity, which is worse. In literature as in life he makes himself felt who not only calls a spade a spade but has the pluck to double spades and redouble.

For another rule—just as rough and ready, but just as useful: Train your suspicions to bristle up whenever you come upon “as regards,” “with regard to,” “in respect of,” “in connection with,” “according as to whether,” and the like. They are all dodges of jargon, circumlocutions for evading this or that simple statement; and I say that it is not enough to avoid them nine times out of ten, or nine-and-ninety times out of a hundred. You should never use them. That is positive enough, I hope? Though I cannot admire his style, I admire the man who wrote to me, “Re Tennyson—your remarks anent his *In Memoriam* make me sick”; for though *re* is not a preposition of the first water, and “anent” has enjoyed its day, the finish crowned the work. But here are a few specimens far, very far, worse:—

The special difficulty in Professor Minocelsi’s case [our old friend “case” again] arose *in connexion with* the view he holds *relative to* the historical value of the opening pages of Genesis.

That is jargon. In prose, even taking the miserable sentence as it stands constructed, we should write “the difficulty arose over the views he holds about the historical value,” etc.

From a popular novelist:—

I was entirely indifferent *as to* the results of the game, caring nothing at all *as to* whether *I had losses or gains*—

Cut out the first “as” in “as to,” and the second “as to” altogether, and the sentence begins to be prose—“I was indifferent to the results of the game, caring nothing whether I had losses or gains.”

But why, like Dogberry, have “had losses”? Why not simply “lose.” Let us try again. “I was entirely indifferent to the results of the game, caring nothing at all whether I won or lost.”

Still the sentence remains absurd; for the second clause but repeats the first without adding one jot. For if you care not at all whether you win or lose, you must be entirely indifferent to the results of the game. So why not say, “I was careless if I won or lost,” and have done with it?

A man of simple and charming character, he was fitly *associated with* the distinction of the Order of Merit.

I take this gem with some others from a collection made three years ago, by the *Oxford Magazine*; and I hope you admire it as one beyond price. “He was associated with the distinction of the Order of Merit” means “he was given the Order of Merit.” If the members of that Order make a society then he was associated with them; but you cannot associate a man with a distinction. The inventor of such fine writing would doubtless have answered Canning’s Needy Knife-grinder with:—

I associate thee with sixpence! I will see thee in another association first!

But let us close our *florilegium* and attempt to illustrate jargon by the converse method of taking a famous piece of English (say Hamlet's soliloquy) and remoulding a few lines of it in this fashion:—

To be, or the contrary? Whether the former or the latter be preferable would seem to admit of some difference of opinion; the answer in the present case being of an affirmative or of a negative character according as to whether one elects on the one hand to mentally suffer the disfavour of fortune, albeit in an extreme degree, or on the other to boldly envisage adverse conditions in the prospect of eventually bringing them to a conclusion. The condition of sleep is similar to, if not indistinguishable from that of death; and with the addition of finality the former might be considered identical with the latter: so that in this connection it might be argued with regard to sleep that, could the addition be effected, a termination would be put to the endurance of a multiplicity of inconveniences, not to mention a number of downright evils incidental to our fallen humanity, and thus a consummation achieved of a most gratifying nature.

That is jargon: and to write jargon is to be perpetually shuffling around in the fog and cotton-wool of abstract terms; to be for ever hearkening, like Ibsen's Peer Gynt, to the voice of the Boyg exhorting you

to circumvent the difficulty, to beat the air because it is easier than to flesh your sword in the thing. The first virtue, the touchstone of masculine style, is its use of the active verb and the concrete noun. When you write in the active voice, "They gave him a silver teapot," you write as a man. When you write "He was made the recipient of a silver teapot," you write jargon. But at the beginning set even higher store on the concrete noun. Somebody—I think it was Fitz-Gerald—once posited the question, "What would have become of Christianity if Jeremy Bentham had had the writing of the Parables?" Without pursuing that dreadful enquiry I ask you to note how carefully the Parables—those exquisite short stories—speak only of "things which you can touch and see"—"A sower went forth to sow," "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took,"—and not the Parables only, but the Sermon on the Mount and almost every verse of the Gospel. The Gospel does not, like my young essayist, fear to repeat a word, if the word be good. The Gospel says "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's"—not "Render unto Cæsar the things that appertain to that potentate." The Gospel does not say "Consider the growth of the lilies," or even "Consider how the lilies grow." It says, "Consider the lilies, how they grow."

Or take Shakespeare. I wager you that no writer of English so constantly chooses the concrete word,

in phrase after phrase forcing you to touch and see. No writer so insistently teaches the general through the particular. He does it even in *Venus and Adonis* (as Professor Wendell, of Harvard, pointed out in a brilliant little monograph on Shakespeare, published some ten years ago). Read any page of *Venus and Adonis* side by side with any page of Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and you cannot but mark the contrast: in Shakespeare the definite, particular, visualised image, in Marlowe the beautiful generalisation, the abstract term, the thing seen at a literary remove. Take the two openings, both of which start out with the sunrise. Marlowe begins:—

Now had the Morn espied her lover's steeds:  
Wherat she starts, puts on her purple weeds,  
And, red for anger that he stay'd so long,  
All headlong throws herself the clouds among.

Shakespeare wastes no words on Aurora and her feelings, but gets to his hero and to business without ado:—

Even as the sun with purple-colour'd face—

(You have the sun visualised at once),

Even as the sun with purple-colour'd face  
Had ta'en his last leave of the weeping morn,  
Rose-cheek'd Adonis hied him to the chase;  
Hunting he loved, but love he laugh'd to scorn.

When Shakespeare has to describe a horse, mark how definite he is:—

Round-hoof'd, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,  
Broad breast, full eye, small head and nostril wide,  
High crest, short ears, straight legs and passing strong;  
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide.

Or again, in a casual simile, how definite:—

Upon this promise did he raise his chin,  
Like a dive-dipper peering through a wave,  
Which, being look'd on, ducks as quickly in.

Or take, if you will, Marlowe's description of Hero's first meeting Leander:—

It lies not in our power to love or hate,  
For will in us is over-ruled by fate . . . ,

and set against it Shakespeare's description of Venus' last meeting with Adonis, as she came on him lying in his blood:—

Or as a snail whose tender horns being hit  
Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain,  
And there, all smother'd up, in shade doth sit,  
Long after fearing to creep forth again;  
So, at his bloody view—

I do not deny Marlowe's lines (if you will study the whole passage) to be lovely. You may even judge

Shakespeare's to be crude by comparison. But you cannot help noting that whereas Marlowe steadily deals in abstract, nebulous terms, Shakespeare constantly uses concrete ones, which later on he learned to pack into verse, such as:—

Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care.

Is it unfair to instance Marlowe, who died young? Then let us take Webster for the comparison; Webster, a man of genius or of something very like it, and commonly praised by the critics for his mastery over definite, detailed, and what I may call *solidified sensation*. Let us take this admired passage from his *Duchess of Malfy*:—

*Ferdinand.* How doth our sister Duchess bear herself  
In her imprisonment?

*Basola.* Nobly: I'll describe her.

She's sad as one long wed to 't, and she  
seems

Rather to welcome the end of misery  
Than shun it: a behaviour so noble  
As gives a majesty to adversity.<sup>1</sup>

You may discern the shape of loveliness  
More perfect in her tears than in her  
smiles;

She will muse for hours together,<sup>2</sup> and  
her silence

<sup>1</sup> Note the abstract terms.

<sup>2</sup> Here we first come on the concrete: and beautiful it is.

Methinks expresseth more than if she spake.

Now set against this the well-known passage from *Twelfth Night* where the Duke asks and Viola answers a question about someone unknown to him and invented by her—a mere phantasm, in short: yet note how much more definite is the language:—

*Viola.* My father had a daughter lov'd a man;  
As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman,  
*I* should your lordship.

*Duke* And what's her history?

*Viola.* A blank, my lord. She never told her love,  
But let concealment, like a worm i' the bud,  
Feed on her damask cheek; she pined in thought,  
And with a green and yellow melancholy  
She sat like Patience on a monument  
Smiling at grief. Was not this love indeed?

Observe (apart from the dramatic skill of it) how, when Shakespeare *has* to use the abstract noun “concealment,” on an instant it turns into a visible worm “feeding” on the visible rose; how, having to use a second abstract word “patience,” at once he solidifies it in tangible stone. . . .

Carlyle noted of Goethe, “his emblematic intellect, his never-failing tendency to transform into *shape*, into *life*, the feeling that may dwell in him. Everything has form, has visual excellence: the

poet's imagination bodies forth the forms of things unseen, and his pen turns them into shape."

A lesson about writing your language may go deeper than language; for language (as in a former lecture I tried to preach to you) is your reason, your *λόγος*. So long as you prefer abstract words, which express other men's summarised concepts of things, to concrete ones which lie as near as can be reached to things themselves and are the firsthand material for your thoughts, you will remain, at the best, writers at second-hand. If your language be jargon, your intellect, if not your whole character, will almost certainly correspond. Where your mind should go straight, it will dodge: the difficulties it should approach with a fair front and grip with a firm hand it will be seeking to evade or circumvent. For the style is the man, and where a man's treasure is there his heart, and his brain, and his writing, will be also.

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH: *On the Art of Writing*. Used by permission of and arrangement with the publishers, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York and London.

## PRACTICAL HINTS

AND now I know I must not end without hazarding a few practical hints—what betting men and undergraduates call “tips”—for general remarks upon literature have little interest for those whose mind runs on sports, and perhaps even less for those whose mind is absorbed in the schools. But as there are always some who dream of a life of “letters,” an occupation already too crowded and far from inviting at the best, they will expect me to tell them how I think they may acquire a command of Style. I know no reason why they should, and I know no way they could set about it. But, supposing one has something to say—something that it concerns the world to know—and this, for a young student, is a considerable claim, “a large order,” I think he calls it in the current dialect, all I have to tell him is this: Think it out quite clearly in your own mind, and then put it down in the simplest words that offer, just as if you were telling it to a friend, but dropping the tags of the day with which your spoken discourse would naturally be garnished. Be familiar, but by no means vulgar. At any rate, be easy, colloquial if you

like, but shun those vocables which come to us across the Atlantic, or from Newmarket and Whitechapel, with which the gilded youth and journalists “up-to-date” love to salt their language. Do not make us “sit up” too much, or always “take a back seat”; do not ask us to “ride for a fall,” to “hurry up,” or “boom it all we know.” Nothing is more irritating in print than the iteration of slang, and those stale phrases with which “the half-baked” seek to convince us that they are “in the swim” and “going strong”—if I may borrow the language of the day—that Volapük of the smart and knowing world. It offends me like the reek of last night’s tobacco.

And then they hunt up terms that are fit for science, poetry, or devotion. They affect “evolution” and “factors,” “the interaction of forces,” “the co-ordination of organs”; or else everything is “weird,” or “opalescent,” “debonair,” and “enamelled,” so that they will not call a spade a spade. I do not say, stick to Saxon words and avoid Latin words as a law of language, because English now consists of both: good and plain English prose needs both. We seldom get the highest poetry without a large use of Saxon, and we hardly reach precise and elaborate explanation without Latin terms. Try to turn *precise and elaborate explanation* into strict Saxon; and then try to turn “Our Father, which art in heaven” into pure Latin words. No! current English prose—not the language

of poetry or of prayer—must be of both kinds, Saxon and Latin. But wherever a Saxon word is enough, use it; because if it have all the fulness and the precision you need, it is the more simple, the more direct, the more homely.

Never quote anything that is not apt and new. Those stale citations of well-worn lines give us a cold shudder, as does a pun at a dinner-party. A familiar phrase from poetry or Scripture may pass when imbedded in your sentence. But to show it round as a nugget which you have just picked up is the innocent freshman's snare. Never imitate any writer, however good. All imitation in literature is a mischief, as it is in art. A great and popular writer ruins his followers and mimics as did Raffaelle and Michelangelo; and when he founds a school of style, he impoverishes literature more than he enriches it. Johnson, Macaulay, Carlyle, Dickens, Ruskin have been the cause of flooding us with cheap copies of their special manner. And even now Meredith, Stevenson, Swinburne, and Pater lead the weak to ape their airs and graces. All imitation in literature is an evil. I say to you, as Mat Arnold said to me (who surely needed no such warning), "Flee Carlylese as the very devil!" Yes, flee Carlylese, Ruskinese, Meredithese, and every other *ese*, past, present, and to come. A writer whose style invites imitation so far falls short of being a true

master. He becomes the parent of caricature, and frequently he gives lessons in caricature himself.

Though you must never imitate any writer, you may study the best writers with care. (And for study choose those who have founded no school, who have no special and imitable style.) Read Pascal and Voltaire in French; Swift, Hume, and Goldsmith in English; and of the moderns, I think, Thackeray and Froude. Ruskin is often too rhapsodical for a student; Meredith too whimsical; Stevenson too "precious," as they love to call it; George Eliot too laboriously enamelled and erudite. When you cannot quietly enjoy a picture for the curiosity aroused by its so-called "brushwork," the painting may be a surprising sleight-of-hand, but is not a master-piece.

Read Voltaire, Defoe, Swift, Goldsmith, and you will come to understand how the highest charm of words is reached (without your being able to trace any special element of charm). The moment you begin to pick out this or that felicity of phrase, this or that sound of music in the words, and directly it strikes you as eloquent, lyrical, pictorial—then the charm is snapped. The style may be fascinating, brilliant, impressive; but it is not perfect.

Of melody in style I have said nothing; nor indeed can anything practical be said. It is a thing infinitely subtle, inexplicable, and rare. If your ear does not

hear the false note, the tautophony or the cacophony in the written sentence, as you read it or frame it silently to yourself, and hear it thus inaudibly long before your eye can pick it forth out of the written words, nay, even when the eye fails to localize it by analysis at all—then you have no inborn sense of the melody of words, and be quite sure that you can never acquire it. One living Englishman has it in the highest form; for the melody of Ruskin's prose may be matched with that of Milton and Shelley. I hardly know any other English prose which retains the ring of that ethereal music—echoes of which are more often heard in our poetry than in our prose. Nay, since it is beyond our reach, wholly incommunicable, defiant of analysis and rule, it may be more wise to say no more.

Read Swift, Defoe, Goldsmith, if you care to know what is pure English. I need hardly tell you to read another and a greater Book. The Book which begot English prose still remains its supreme type. The English Bible is the true school of English literature. It possesses every quality of our language in its highest form—except for scientific precision, practical affairs, and philosophic analysis. It would be ridiculous to write an essay on metaphysics, a political article, or a novel in the language of the Bible. Indeed, it would be ridiculous to write anything at all in the language of the Bible. But if you care to know the best that our

literature can give in simple noble prose—mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Holy Scriptures in the English tongue.

FREDERIC HARRISON: *On English Prose*. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company.

## SOUND AND SENSE

WE have already discussed the importance of choosing—deliberately selecting—words for their meaning. I am now going to discuss the choice of sounds for their sense, which is not quite the same thing. In choosing the right word for its meaning one takes a great many things, half consciously, into consideration. In order that the word may be an exact symbol of the idea expressed, one chooses it for its atmosphere, its associated ideas, its so-called colour, its length and shape, and, of course, its sound. In choosing the sound for the sense everything else is subordinated to this sound suggestion: one relies almost entirely upon the sound—and ideas suggested by the sound—to make the word or phrase an exact symbol of the thought.

All words are sound symbols. Even the written word is primarily a sound symbol; and I cannot imagine reading a great poem and regarding the words as sight symbols alone; for what then happens to the music which is the basis of all poetry? As a matter of fact I believe everyone hears in his mind the sound of the words he reads. Write C-A-T on paper,

and I defy anyone, even the sceptic who stoppeth his ears, not to hear the *sound* of the little word "cat." No one can read a sea-poem by Swinburne without hearing the music of the words, and of the wind and the sea, go swinging through his mind. I do not know how it may be with others, but I myself when I read a letter from a friend, invariably "hear" him read it aloud in his own voice.

Choose the sound for the sense when you write, just as you do, so naturally, when you talk, only in writing you must choose with more subtlety. Notice first the choice of Proper Names—which, after all, are merely private noises—sounds grunted or squeaked or purred at you by your godfathers and godmothers, and thereby settled upon you as your private noise for life. How is it that some names seem to fit so well, while others are so incongruous? What do you mean when you say "I could have guessed his name was Rupert—he is *just* like it"; or "I never saw anyone less like a Priscilla in my life"? Why did Swift call the island of his little people "Lilliput" and the land of the giants Brobdignag? And why is the little Brobdignagian maiden forty feet high named Glumdalclitch, while the name of the emperor of Lilliput ends in Mulley Uly Gue? The answer is self-evident; it is for the same reason that you call your little fox-terrier "Rip" or "Kim," while if you had a tame elephant you would never dream of calling him

“Snap” or “Perky.” When I was a small boy I possessed a tortoise of incredible pomposity and weight. We should never have dreamt of calling him “Fluff” or “Ping-Pong.” We called him “Uncle James.” It is the *sound* of these names that makes all the difference, as the effect of the same name differently pronounced will show. The name “Samuel” gives me an impression of strength and frank honesty. But pronounce it as in the ridiculous rhyme—

Samuël oh! Sam-uël  
Beware the awful cam-uël!—

and what impression do we get now? “Mabel” was once a very lovely name till mispronunciation killed the music in it. The sound of town names is wonderfully suggestive: Between “Cambridge” and “Caimbr’dge” lies the gulf which divides Gown from Town; and one may hear the roll of the traffic in the name “London.” The greatest writers use the sound of proper names with wonderful effect, and we shall do well to take the hint.

As everybody knows, there are a vast number of words in the language—*onomatopœic* words they are called—which were deliberately coined to imitate a sound. Bird-notes such as “peewit,” “cuckoo,” “chiff-chaff,” give names to the birds; hoot, clang, crash, jingle, thunders, and thousands more, are definite sound-words. A minute’s thought will suggest dozens

more to your mind. The language is full of them, and they are perfectly easy to use. The real fun begins when you wish to suggest sounds by means of words or phrases which have not been specially coined to imitate them. That is an art, a point of style, well worth cultivating; for to be successful you must be able to hear and appreciate the music of vowel sounds, and the effect of every kind of consonant. English poetry is full of such words and phrases. Scores of lovely lines crowd into my mind at this moment; but I will have none of them, for it is with prose, not poetry, that we are dealing.

When fitting the sound to the sense in prose you must be careful to conceal your art, or it will look like a trick. Once more I would urge you to say the sentence in your head before you put it down on paper: you will then hear for yourself whether the sound corresponds with the sense.

One or two examples will make my meaning clear. There is a sentence from Stevenson: "One of the rocks bounded over the edge of the cliff and went pounding down into the valley." Three times in that sentence we can hear the rock,—and yet the effect is not produced by a trick. Or this from Melville's *Moby Dick*: "How the wild winds blow it; they whip it about as the torn shreds of sail lash the tossed ship they cling to." Here nothing is overdone;—indeed, it is not *easy* to see how he gets his effect; but

the effect is there. Again, there are words, and collocations of words, which are sheer music in themselves, a melody in the mind, even when some of the most musical words convey no more than a faint image. A little while ago London was thrilled by a daring jewel robbery in the West End. This sordid little incident inspired the leader-writer of the *Evening Standard* to produce an article, which I read with delight, in which he spoke of the "Romance of Jewels," and the never-failing inspiration in the sound of jewel names. He quoted in full the jewel passage from the New Testament—a passage which is music to the ear, but which conveys little more to most of us than a general impression of rare loveliness and brilliance. Let me quote the lines once more: "The first foundation was jasper; the second sapphire; the third a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst." There are some sounds that dazzle and gleam and glow, and these are of them.

There is one more aspect of sound-sense with which you should be familiar—and that is Prose-Rhythm. That there is a rhythm of prose as well as of verse has been known for a very long time—certainly since Aristotle, probably much longer; but the vast majority of people do not know about it, or have not

bothered to notice it. Prose rhythm is entirely different from poetry rhythm, but it is just as real, and it can be cultivated and practised to the enormous advantage of prose style, from the sense it gives one of new possibilities in Prose. One cannot read, for instance, De Quincey's *Opium Eater*, Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn-burial*, above all the Authorized Version of the Bible, without being struck by the wonderfully musical quality of the prose. Yet it *is* prose, and not poetry. Take any sentence from *Urn-burial*, and you realize at once that the words have been deliberately chosen and arranged for a beautiful rhythmic effect. Here is a scrap taken at random: "But to subsist in bones, and be but pyramidally extant, is a fallacy in duration." One cannot fail to realize the lovely rhythm, so different from that of poetry. This again from the same book: "Some being of the opinion of Thales, that water was the originall of all things, thought it most equal to submit unto the principle of putrefaction, and conclude in a moist relentment." (That final phrase "and conclude in a moist relentment" seems to me to be quite perfect.) And let me quote you a passage, lovely in its sound as in its sense, from that most companionable of books, *The Compleat Angler* by old Izaak Walton: "But the Nightingale, another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet loud musick out of her little instrumental throat, that it might make mankind to think that miracles are not

ceased. He that at midnight, when the very labourer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have very often, the clear airs, the sweet descants, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of her voice, might well be lifted above earth, and say “Lord, what musick hast Thou provided for the Saints in Heaven, when thou affordest bad men such musick on Earth! ” ”

Above all, we find the most perfect prose-rhythm in that miracle of great literature, the Authorized Version. Listen to this sentence from Isaiah: “Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the Glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!” Can you conceive more perfect prose-rhythm than that—or more musical word-sounds? Note, too, the effect of those three “i’s,” the open “i” which gives the English language so much of its brilliance and light. Then read the great passage on Charity, first in the Authorized Version, and then as it has been Revised, the word “Charity” being changed to “Love.” The rhythm is spoilt, the charm and delicacy gone. “Charity suffereth long and is kind,” “Charity never faileth”; and then, “Love never faileth,” “Love suffereth long.” It is a thousand pities; but one must remember that Bishop Ellicott, great scholar as he was, did not know the tune of the National Anthem when he heard it.

This is not the place to suggest a satisfactory theory of prose-rhythm—to do more than point out its existence, its supreme importance—to those who had

not noticed it. It is a difficult subject, but this is the main secret—that whereas the rhythm of poetry is formal, metrical and repetitive, the key to prose-rhythm is a well-balanced and judicious *variety*.

GUY N. POCOCK: *Pen and Ink*.  
The Adelphi Company. Used  
by permission of and arrange-  
ment with Greenberg, Publisher  
Inc.

## CLAY AND BRONZE

LET no man think to improve in his working by any knowledge that can be taken up or laid down at will, any means or appliances from without. All improvement in the creation must first exist in the creator. Say not to the artist, write, paint, play, by such and such a rule, but *grow* by it. Have you literary principles?—write them in your leisure hours on the fleshly tables of the heart. Have you theories of taste?—set your brain in idle time to their tune. Is there a virtue you would emulate, or a fault you would discard?—gaze on spare days upon the one till your soul has risen under it as the tide under the moon, or scourge the other in the sight of all your faculties till every internal sense recoils from its company. Then, when your error is no longer a trespass to be condemned by judgment, but an impiety at which feeling revolts—when your virtue is no more obedience to a formula, but the natural action of a reconstructed soul—strike off the clay mold from the bronze Apollo, throw your critics to one wind and their sermons to the other, let Self be made absolute as you take up your pen and write, like a god, in a sublime egotism, to which your own likes and dislikes are unquestioned law.

SIDNEY DOBELL: *Curer Bell.*  
188

## “THESE BUT THE TRAPPINGS . . .”

IT was once my misfortune to hear an unmusical friend practicing a Chopin Prelude to the dull click of the metronome. She had what critics call a good execution—surely a phrase carried over from military parlance. There was never a false note, never a failure to synchronize with the little clicking devil on the piano. At last she reached a triumphant close, held down the keys while the metronome clicked six final times, and turned to me, confident of having made what Captain Costigan termed a meritorious performance. Perhaps something in my face gave birth to a doubt.

“My teacher doesn’t let me put in the expression until my second lesson on the piece,” she remarked complacently.

No use, I suppose, to point the moral toward Chopin, toward the integral character of the musical notations and the directions given to “express” their meaning, their spirit. But the likeness between “putting expression” into music and “putting style” into writing is worth considering for a little time. For both notions rest on the fallacy that expression and

style are adornments that can be added to the original composition, in much the same way as liquid rouge to an anemic face, or curry powder to a stew ancient and suspect. And in none of these apparently unlike things is the added ingredient much more than an unsuccessful camouflage if the original element is itself poor or cheap or shoddy.

There is no hocus-pocus about style. If a man have something to say, a desire to say it, and a decent equipment in the mechanics of his language, his style will never be really bad. It may not be good. It may be as ordinary as the boiled potatoes that in my childhood were always associated with wash day. It may be as homely as are, in the estimation of our wives, the girls they hear we once admired. It may, in Miss Millay's words, be as domestic as a plate. But it will not be bad. The secret of a really bad style—should anyone care to know it—is to dress up one's lack of ideas and perceptions and emotions in false trappings, and to worship form as something distinct from substance.

It is now our painful duty to examine some of these poor tinsel adornments. If we find among them a few of our own favorites, all the better. We have all been guilty, some time or other, of disguise, pretence, or display. Sometimes the guilt has been unconscious. In our wanderings along the bargain counters of everyday speech and writing, inevitably the sleeves of

our memories have caught up some pieces of cheap finery and held them fast. Let us shake them loose if we can.

A good many errors in style come from our forgetting that we write primarily for the mind, the spirit, and the imagination, and not for the ear. Exceptions, of course, are the nonsense rhymes of childhood—though even these have been lately psycho-analysed—and the lyrics of popular songs, which fortunately make sense but seldom. Many writers, however, seem to adopt as their motto that classic injunction of Alice in Wonderland, “Take care of the sounds and the sense will take care of itself.” Mr. Pecksniff, that moral man, was of the opinion of Alice:

“Playful—playful warbler,” said Mr. Pecksniff. It may be observed in connection with his calling his daughter a “warbler,” that she was not at all vocal, but that Mr. Pecksniff was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding out a sentence well, without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again.

Unfortunately, neither Mr. Pecksniff’s hypocrisy nor his diction is dead. A good many writers, amateur and professional, have a trick of making us “gasp again” and, while we gasp, fail to note any absence of

thought in what they have said. Let us look at some of their ways.

Take first alliteration. Now in verse, alliteration has a worthy place, though even there it may be used to excess. In prose, its position is not so respectable. The habit of alliteration, once formed, is insidious. It is an easy way to make the shop-worn remnants of machine-made thinking sound fresh and original. Many a platitude has rung for days in the ears of readers unaware that an alluring combination of t's or d's or p's has concealed a fundamental lack of thought. Alliteration is an unfailing help to the advertiser, the advertiser of himself or of a manufactured product. We are led to "Buy Betty's Better Butter for Babies" rather than "Mary's Improved Butter for Infants" because the first has five capital B's and the second pursues it weakly with only two capital I's. We are more impressed by the humane society orator who speaks of the unequivocal excellence of the equine, that quiet, unquerulous quadruped, than by the plain-spoken gentleman who tells us that the horse is a noble animal. The pyrotechnical politician who promises promptly to purge politics of the pernicious depredations of predatory plutocracy gets our vote rather than he who guarantees us against the influence of organized wealth. We do all these things, and probably will so continue; we do them, but we need not say them as well.

A small amount of alliteration, in which the sound is echoed or suggested from one important word to another, may be valuable in prose. The unintentional alliteration which results from the inevitable repetition of some of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet in every sentence cannot be avoided and is a matter of no concern so long as it is not obtrusive and does not result in wrong emphases. But before one grows too eager at listening for the pleasant recurrence of vowels and consonants in his sentences, let him be sure that he has something to say, that the appeal to the ear does not overwhelm that to the brain and lead the writer into false balances and contrasts for their own sake. Alliteration is pre-eminently the vice of the young, the exuberant, the immature. For him in whom it survives to maturity, there is little to be done. We can only, as Mr. Pecksniff once phrased it, “convey him to the hospital in Hope, and sit beside his bed in Bounty.”

Another device of the *Alice-in-Wonderland* stylists is excessive rhythm. Good prose, of course, is rhythmic. But the rhythm of prose, unlike that of verse, is broken, irregular, unexpected. Otherwise, we have sing-song, and sing-song is an extremely unfortunate thing to have. It is an affliction of all those who wish to force a sentiment further than it would naturally go—of some orators, some sermonizers, some students who are mistakenly told to write something

pathetic when they do not feel pathetic at all, even of Charles Dickens when he becomes more interested in words than in story or is afraid that we do not care enough about his Little Nells. Let us see Dickens at his worst. Not content with the difficulties which the opening of *Martin Chuzzlewit* evidently offered him, he goes out of his way to describe a sunset. Sunsets are always dangerous in prose, especially if accompanied by wind. This one was so dangerous that we can write it as rather poor iambic pentameter, though in the novel it has the shape of prose.

A moment, and its glory was no more.  
The sun went down beneath the long dark lines  
Of hill and cloud which piled up in the west  
An airy city, wall heaped on wall,  
And battlement on battlement; the light  
Was all withdrawn; the shining church turned cold  
And dark; the stream forgot to smile; the birds  
Were silent; and the gloom of winter dwelt  
On everything.

. . . . .

(The wind rose, and the withered leaves hurried forth—)

In search of shelter from its chill pursuit;  
The labourer unyoked his horses, and  
With head bent down, trudged briskly home beside them;  
And from the cottage window lights began  
To glance and wink upon the darkening fields.

Over-rhythmic prose, prose that can, but should not be, scanned as verse, has a few camp-followers that ought to be detected at once. One of these is an over-zealous attempt at balance and antithesis, a habit of getting up on the one hand and sitting down on the other, of making a contrast, putting black opposite white, good opposite bad, whether there is any reason for it or not. To the hardened maker of balances, life is only a series of pros and cons; everything has an opposite which must be mentioned; ideas come in antithetical or complementary pairs; a lion and a lamb must march in every sentence. So baneful is this sort of phrase making that a man like Macaulay let it permeate his whole thinking and when dealing with two characters like Addison and Steele blackened one at the expense of the other to serve the god of balance. Nor should one be too mindful of that dear device of the rhetoricians, the law of increasing volume. It is not fitting for all sentences that their parts should grow till they stand in the successive relation to one another of the three bears in the nursery tale. Ideas are their own masters; they cannot always be forced into three separate parts, with each successive one containing more words than the other; and when they are so forced, arbitrarily and consciously, as they are being forced in this very sentence, they are liable all too often to turn and rend their creators.

The best practical advice for those who are anxious about the sound of their sentences is that they read the whole composition aloud after it is finished. If one's ear is properly attuned, it will catch the sing-song, the unintended rhymes, the harsh or sputtering combinations, the vocables horrific, even the monotony of an insufficiently varied pattern. If one's ear is untrained for such detection, or does not naturally distinguish between proper and improper cadences, nothing is better than to turn to the masters of English prose and listen to their accents. Conscious melody in prose writing is an achievement to be striven for only after the major virtues of a good style have been gained. Even then one must beware lest its siren bewitchment lead him to say what he does not mean, or what has no meaning at all.

A second great cause of bad style is the writer's tendency to underestimate the intelligence of his reader or his capacity for being moved by the power of the subject. We are dull and phlegmatic enough, goodness knows, but we are not all fools and churls. Yet how many times are our brains and our spirits insulted? Consider a few of the ways in which we are thus affronted from the best of motives.

Grown men are able to retain in their minds a series of ideas and to relate them into a central whole when the end of a paragraph is reached, especially if they have the assistance of a topic sentence. In other

words, paragraphs of a single sentence, baby paragraphs, are wanton injuries to the intelligence of even the moderately mature. Furthermore, a piece of writing, an editorial, for example, made up almost entirely of sentence-paragraphs defeats its own ends. Its dead-level monotony gives the same effect as though it were written in one solid block. The same statements apply to infantile sentences. Ideas are related, causally, temporally, and in a dozen other ways. The great achievement of English prose since the time of Dryden has been its union of two traits—an easy and fluent clarity which is the ideal of good conversation, and the ability to indicate complex and subtle relationships among ideas. Malory wrote clearly and colloquially for the most part; he lacked the second trait of standard prose, but then he seldom had anything very subtle to say. Milton, Sir Thomas Browne, and Burton wrote prose of such intricacy as to border on the ponderous, however beautiful and dignified it may be at times. But it was not until the age of Dryden that the two virtues were combined. Now we seem almost destined to lose what we have gained in the last two and a half centuries, when we write such sentences as these: "He stood. John Francis Pinckney. Waiting. Wondering. Eager. Late again. Never on time. Dawdling over her mirror, probably. He took out his watch. Ten till eight. Three minutes slow, too, he remembered. Show began at eight-thirty. Less than

forty minutes." This is what some modern critics call a sinewy and athletic style. To me, it seems muscle-bound and creaking at the too-numerous joints. And so our mentality is flouted with this pre-digested sort of writing, with shredded paragraphs, and sentences "shot from guns," like a well-advertised breakfast food. Only the artillery this time seems to be of the pop-gun variety.

Our capacity for feeling, for sympathizing, fares no better. Apparently our sensibilities must be whipped up with verbal switches. Let us suppose that a young writer wishes to tell us about the death of Grandfather Green, and hopes that we will feel sorry that the old fellow is no more. Now Grandfather Green was a good old gentleman, it appears,—kind, just, and righteous. He died friendless and alone, just as the sun was setting. The last item is unimportant, unless the old man felt it to be so, for death at one time of the day is as bad as at another. In these circumstances, anyone but an undertaker's assistant should feel sorry over Grandfather Green's death, provided the writer tells the right things about it, simply and well. We do not need to know that a last feeble ray of the declining sun fell for an instant on the pillow of the dying man, lighting up his pallid features with a parting benediction, and then left them forever wan and lifeless as the shadow of the Grim Reaper hovered silently over the humble

pallet and Grandfather Green’s soul departed for that bourne from which no traveler returns, leaving forever tenantless the withered earthly shell upon the bed in the little room. We do not need to know that Rover, the poor little dog, faithful to the last, gave one despairing whine and then stretched out stiff and stark upon the cold bare floor, and that the parrot, relic of Grandfather Green’s seafaring days, uttered a plaintive croak and fell precipitately off its perch, face downward, on the floor of its cage, quite, quite dead. We do not need to know that the wind, fluttering the dingy curtains in sad farewell to the departing spirit, now winging its way to its celestial home, wafted in from the tall maple tree outside the window one scarlet leaf and deposited it gently on the clasped transparent hands of the old gentleman, and that the flowers in the old-fashioned garden below drooped and closed their blossoms in sorrow for him who would never more wend his tottering way among them to admire their fragile and fragrant beauty.

No. Grandfather Green is dead. If we have been made to know him, his worth, his loneliness, it is enough. Friendless old age is as sad a thing as one can come upon. It is enough. Not all the falsehoods of sentimentality can move us so much as the facts and the spiritual truth in their interpretation. Look at some of the great deaths of literature: King Lear, Milton’s Samson, Colonel Newcome, Michael Hen-

chard, Lord Jim; they are circumstantial, assuredly, but the circumstances are those that grow out of the characters and the situation: that is their beauty; that is their pathos. The reader is treated as a human being with a heart easily to be moved at the spectacle of human grief, sorrow, and suffering. Sympathy is allowed to come of itself, and it comes surely.

For I have that within which passes show—  
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

Sentimentality, then, is not simply a matter of underestimating the reader's capacity; it has roots likewise in pretence, the pretence of having more feeling than the writer really possesses. Pretentiousness in writing, however, has other manifestations. It shows itself in needless or unsuitable figures of speech, in the vice known as fine writing, in the unnecessary use of foreign phrases, in the hollow attempt at erudition seen in the employment of the archaic, in novelty for its own sake, and in a too obvious effort at variety.

A figure of speech should be fresh, suitable, spontaneous, and without confused suggestion—a spark struck hot from the imagination, or a subdued and momentary gleam. If it lacks any of these four qualities, it is worse than useless. Rosy-fingered morn, raven tresses, alabaster brows, were all once, in the dark backward of time, new and unspoiled. They are no longer so. To-day they arouse amusement rather

than respect. Many a young writer comes upon them and others of their kind in his reading with a startled delight and captures them, unaware of their long centuries of enslavement. Not all the kind remonstrances of teachers and friends can convince him of their staleness until he has met them again and again and learns to weary of them as part of his own literary property. When he has avoided them, a second problem awaits him. He must consider the occasion. In describing, for example, a midnight meeting of two lovers beside a little lake, he must restrain himself from saying that the pool glittered like a dead man's eye, unless he wants to hint at an element of sinister fatality. When Hardy, however, is dealing with the scene of a rural tragedy, such a simile is exactly right. Nor should the author's enthusiasm allow him to mix his figures, to combine the literal and the metaphorical or two incongruous suggestions; that way lies unintended merriment. Some of us can seldom think of Hardy's ill-fated Tess without smiling at the statement of Angel Clare about her beauty—that he had never seen such lips as hers on the face of the world. Yet this is nothing to the recent statement of an Ohio minister that our Puritan forefathers "shot Indians through the port-hole with one eye and taught the Bible to their children with the other." Finally, if the writer avoids all these disasters, he may still, with much groaning and agony,

achieve a metaphor that is dull, lifeless, and forced. Better not to have striven for one at all, but to have written simply and literally. Where the mind is not constantly lighted up by a series of imaginative flashes, as are the minds of Shakspere, of Shelley, of Meredith, the struggle for metaphorical conception were better never begun.

“Fine writing” is the greatest betrayer of pretentiousness in style. Look back at the account of the death of Grandfather Green. There you have it, with its tawdry figures of speech, its supposedly elegant circumlocutions, its pseudo-poetic diction, its concern with manner rather than substance. It is the pink lemonade in the circus of false style—artificially colored, flat, thirst-provoking rather than thirst-satisfying. Its home is in the village newspaper of yesterday, with the flowery obituaries, the accounts of pleasant birthday parties, when the festal board groaned under the weight of luscious viands, in the chronicles of grammar school commencements, of Fourth of July orations, of weddings at which the groom, tastefully attired in blue serge, led the blushing bride, garbed in maidenly modesty and the choicest handiwork of Mlle. Leota’s Parisienne Shoppe, to the hymeneal altar, decked in nature’s garlands furnished by the Hook Floral Company, where the servant of the Lord waited to pronounce the solemn words that were to join them forever on their voyage to-

gether down the river of time on the bark of holy matrimony into the safe harbor of wedded bliss. That is “fine writing.”

Nor do the vast resources of the English language itself always suffice for the pretentious. A generation ago Latin, even Greek, were called in to assist it. To-day it is French. We hear of *nuances* rather than subtleties, of a *chef d’œuvre* rather than a masterpiece; our steak is served *aux champignons* rather than with mushrooms. Even our advertisers have succumbed. They have a *parfum* for *Madame*, they tell us, direct from the Parisian *parfumiers*. Imagine its delicate *odeur*, its *charme*. How *piquant*, how allusive, how *chic*. It is the *essence* of *fleurs*. Try one *bouteille*, *une bouteille exquise*, of *Parfum d’Ouest*, and know the *secret* prepared *spécialement* for *la dame Américaine*.

Another form of this pretentiousness is seen in the use of archaisms. “Whilom” and “betimes,” “wending our way,” “anon,” “methinks” and “meseems,” “in sooth” and “belike”—these are a few of the offenders. Advertisers, again, have fallen easy victims. Our streets are lined with signs like *Ye Gifte Shoppe*, *Ye Gowne Shoppe*, *Ye Olde Tyme Inne*, *Ye Olde Fashyoned Motion Picture Palayce*, even *Ye Olde Radio Shoppe*, than which an advertiser can go no further.

Novelty, as well as pretentiousness, is at the base of

all these habits. Yet novelty has other sins which fall entirely upon its own head. One is the unnecessary coinage of terms. Our language is constantly growing, like any language that is really alive. It grows by borrowing, by adaptation, by creation, as symbols are needed for new discoveries, inventions, and concepts. Automobile, basketball, broadcast, electron, colloid, behaviorism,—all are new and necessary words. Slang itself, when it is vivid, when it is kept in its proper place, when it enriches rather than impoverishes the vocabulary, is not so pernicious a thing as some people think. But, when we have a respectable, an established, and an effective word to express our meaning, and, furthermore, one which is generally and widely understood, why coin another merely to be eccentric? One Sunday I stayed at home from church rather than hear a sermon on “Cultivating the Want-To.” By the “Want-To,” the minister probably meant the will. I have never found out.

Sometimes the conventional warning to be various is taken too seriously, and pretentiousness results. It is true that we should not emulate the heathen and indulge in vain repetitions. But repetition is as much a matter of thought as it is of phrase, and if we do not keep saying the same thing over again, a little care and common sense will prevent monotony of style. The attempt to ring the changes on a word is often positively vicious. When the occasion for repeti-

tion arises, the use of a synonym rather than the same word again is sometimes confusing, as it gives the impression that we are passing on to a new idea instead of continuing to deal with the old one. It is as if we were recounting the barber shop adventures of a man named John Smith, familiarly known as Cap, and were to say, "John went into the barber shop and sat down. Cap waited twenty minutes and then, seeing no prospect of a shave, Smith went out." Verbs of saying likewise take amazing forms. Such variations as *answered*, *retorted*, *snapped*, and *drawled* are permissible and effective; *gloomed* and *grinned* and *grated* and *rapped* and *crisped* are distortions beyond the limits of legality or sense. A famous series of detective stories deals with a gentleman named Cleek, the Man of Forty Faces, so called from his gift of being able to remodel his countenance at an instant's notice. Such a gift, valuable no doubt for a detective, is not particularly so for the writer. Ideas are meant to be revealed, not disguised.

Finally, a besetting sin of the bad writer is laziness. He makes no attempt to find the exact phrase, the "one word with meat in it," as Lowell calls it. He takes easy refuge in triteness, in slang, in short cuts. He confuses the parts of speech. He runs words together into sticky compounds like *viewpoint*, *nearby*, *worthwhile*, and *insofar*. He qualifies his utterance for fear of being forced to defend its ac-

curacy and like the negro preacher warns us that unless we repent, as it were, and are baptized, in a measure, we shall all, so to speak, be damned, to a certain extent. He pads his writing with such dead wood as "along these lines," "in a way," "in certain respects," —all the meaningless combinations which in writing take the place of the drawling ah's and er's of the speaker who is trying to remember what, if anything, he had to say. His connectives are confined to *and*, *but*, and *so*—especially to *so*. His punctuation is telegraphic,—the dot and the dash, with sometimes a comma used to splice two independent clauses into an unhappy union. Not for him the style that fits the thought as the athlete's skin fits his muscles; his is the flabby skin of the lady who has too suddenly decided to reduce.

All these defects of style, these false trappings adopted to cover insincerity or emptiness, are not so much faults of technique as faults of thinking. The writer who tries merely to patch them up as they are pointed out to him in his work will not go far. "Save the surface and you save all" may be an excellent slogan for the commodity which it advertises, but it is a fatal one for the writer. He must rid himself of his fondness for sound rather than sense, of his sentimentality, of his hypocrisy, of his pretentiousness, of his laziness. Only then will he write with anything that can honorably be called style.

---

ESSAYS ILLUSTRATING  
VARIOUS KINDS OF STYLE

---



## CHARITY

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then

that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

*The King James Version of the  
Bible: First Corinthians, Chapter 13.*

## REVENGE

**R**EVENGE is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out. For as for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law; but the revenge of that wrong putteth the law out of office. Certainly, in taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior; for it is a prince's part to pardon. And Solomon, I am sure, saith, *It is the glory of a man to pass by an offence.* That which is past is gone, and irrevocable; and wise men have enough to do with things present and to come; therefore they do but trifle with themselves, that labor in past matters. There is no man doth a wrong for the wrong's sake; but thereby to purchase himself profit, or pleasure, or honor, or the like. Therefore why should I be angry with a man for loving himself better than me? And if any man should do wrong merely out of ill-nature, why, yet it is but like the thorn or briar, which prick and scratch, because they can do no other. The most tolerable sort of revenge is for those wrongs which there is no law to remedy; but then let a man take heed the revenge be such as there is no law

to punish; else a man's enemy is still before hand, and it is two for one. Some, when they take revenge, are desirous the party should know whence it cometh. This is the more generous. For the delight seemeth to be not so much in doing the hurt as in making the party repent. But base and crafty cowards are like the arrow that flieth in the dark. Cosmus, duke of Florence, had a desperate saying against perfidious or neglecting friends, as if those wrongs were unpardonable; *You shall read (saith he) that we are commanded to forgive our enemies; but you never read that we are commanded to forgive our friends.* But yet the spirit of Job was in a better tune: *Shall we (saith he) take good at God's hands, and not be content to take evil also?* And so of friends in a proportion. This is certain, that a man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well. Public revenges are for the most part fortunate; as that for the death of Cæsar; for the death of Pertinax; for the death of Henry the Third of France; and many more. But in private revenges it is not so. Nay rather, vindictive persons live the life of witches; who, as they are mischievous, so end they unfortunate.

SIR FRANCIS BACON: *Essays*

## THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

GOOD and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed upon Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixed. It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil, that is to say of knowing good by evil. As therefore the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal gar-

land is to be run for, not without dust and heat. As surely we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary. That virtue therefore which is but a youngling in the contemplation of evil, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank virtue, not a pure; her whiteness is but an excremental whiteness; which was the reason why our sage and serious poet Spenser, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guion, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know, and yet abstain. Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with less danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity than by reading all manner of tractates and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.

JOHN MILTON: *On the Freedom of the Press.*

## CHIVALRY

BUT the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever. Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage while it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness.

EDMUND BURKE: *Reflections on the Revolution in France.*

## A CHAPTER ON EARS

**I** HAVE no ear.—

Mistake me not, reader,—nor imagine that I am by nature destitute of those exterior twin appendages, hanging ornaments and (architecturally speaking) handsome volutes to the human capital. Better my mother had never borne me.—I am, I think, rather delicately than copiously provided with those conduits; and I feel no disposition to envy the mule for his plenty, or the mole for her exactness, in those ingenious labyrinthine inlets—those indispensable side-intelligencers.

Neither have I incurred, or done anything to incur, with Defoe, that hideous disfigurement, which constrained him to draw upon assurance—to feel “quite unabashed,” and at ease upon that article. I was never, I thank my stars, in the pillory; nor, if I read them aright, is it within the compass of my destiny, that I ever should be.

When therefore I say that I have no ear, you will understand me to mean—for music.—To say that this heart never melted at the concourse of sweet sounds, would be a foul self-libel.—“*Water parted*

*from the sea*" never fails to move it strangely. So does "*In infancy*." But they were used to be sung at her harpsichord (the old-fashioned instrument in vogue in those days) by a gentlewoman—the gentlest, sure, that ever merited the appellation—the sweetest—why should I hesitate to name Mrs. S——, once the blooming Fanny Weatheral of the Temple—who had power to thrill the soul of Elia, small imp as he was, even in his long coats; and to make him glow, tremble, and blush with a passion, that not faintly indicated the day-spring of that absorbing sentiment, which was afterwards destined to overwhelm and subdue his nature quite, for Alice W——n.

I even think that *sentimentally* I am disposed to harmony. But *organically* I am incapable of a tune. I have been practising "*God save the King*" all my life; whistling and humming of it over to myself in solitary corners; and am not yet arrived, they tell me, within many quavers of it. Yet hath the loyalty of Elia never been impeached.

I am not without suspicion that I have an undeveloped faculty of music within me. For, thrumming, in my wild way, on my friend A.'s piano, the other morning, while he was engaged in an adjoining parlour,—on his return he was pleased to say, "*he thought it could not be the maid!*" On his first surprise at hearing the keys touched in somewhat an airy and

masterful way, not dreaming of me, his suspicions had lighted on *Jenny*. But a grace snatched from a superior refinement, soon convinced him that some being,—technically perhaps deficient, but higher informed from a principle common to all the fine arts,—had swayed the keys to a mood which *Jenny*, with all her (less-cultivated) enthusiasm, could never have elicited from them. I mention this as a proof of my friend's penetration, and not with any view of disparaging *Jenny*.

Scientifically I could never be made to understand (yet have I taken some pains) what a note in music is; or how one note should differ from another. Much less in voices can I distinguish a soprano from a tenor. Only sometimes the thorough bass I contrive to guess at, from its being super-eminently harsh and disagreeable. I tremble, however, for my misapplication of the simplest terms of *that* which I disclaim. While I profess my ignorance, I scarce know what to *say* I am ignorant of. I hate, perhaps, by misnomers. *Sostenuto* and *adagio* stand in the like relation of obscurity to me; and *Sol*, *Fa*, *Mi*, *Re*, is as conjuring as *Baralipton*.

It is hard to stand alone—in an age like this,—(constituted to the quick and critical perception of all harmonious combinations, I verily believe, beyond all preceding ages, since Jubal stumbled upon the gamut)—to remain as it were singly unimpressible to

the magic influences of an art which is said to have such an especial stroke at soothing, elevating, and refining the passions.—Yet rather than break the candid current of my confessions, I must avow to you, that I have received a great deal more pain than pleasure from this so cried-up faculty.

I am constitutionally susceptible of noises. A carpenter's hammer, in a warm summer noon, will fret me into more than midsummer madness. But those unconnected, unset sounds are nothing to the measured malice of music. The ear is passive to those single strokes; willingly enduring stripes, while it hath no task to con. To music it cannot be passive. It will strive—mine at least will—'spite of its inaptitude, to thrid the maze; like an unskilled eye painfully poring upon hieroglyphics. I have sat through an Italian Opera, till, for sheer pain, and inexplicable anguish, I have rushed out into the noisiest places of the crowded streets, to solace myself with sounds, which I was not obliged to follow, and get rid of the distracting torment of endless, fruitless, barren attention! I take refuge in the unpretending assemblage of honest common-life sounds;—and the purgatory of the Enraged Musician becomes my paradise.

I have sat at an Oratorio (that profanation of the purposes of the cheerful playhouse) watching the faces of the auditory in the pit (what a contrast to Hogarth's Laughing Audience!) immovable, or af-

fecting some faint emotion,—till (as some have said, that our occupations in the next world will be but a shadow of what delighted us in this) I have imagined myself in some cold Theatre in Hades, where some of the *forms* of the earthly one should be kept up, with none of the *enjoyment*; or like that—

—Party in a parlour,  
All silent, and all DAMNED!

Above all those insufferable concertos, and pieces of music, as they are called, do plague and embitter my apprehension.—Words are something; but to be exposed to an endless battery of mere sounds; to be long a dying, to lie stretched upon a rack of roses; to keep up languor by unintermittent effort; to pile honey, to an interminable tedious sweetness; to fill up sound with feeling, and strain ideas to keep pace with it; to gaze on empty frames, and be forced to make the pictures for yourself; to read a book *all stops*, and be obliged to supply the verbal matter; to invent extempore tragedies to answer to the vague gestures of an inexplicable rambling mime—these are faint shadows of what I have undergone from a series of the ablest-executed pieces of this empty *instrumental music*.

I deny not, that in the opening of a concert, I have experienced something vastly lulling and agreeable:—afterwards followeth the languor, and the oppres-

sion. Like that disappointing book in Patmos; or, like the comings on of melancholy, described by Burton, doth music make her first insinuating approaches:—“Most pleasant it is to such as are melancholy given, to walk alone in some solitary grove, betwixt wood and water, by some brook side, and to meditate upon some delightsome and pleasant subject, which shall affect him most, *amabilis insania*, and *mentis gratis-simus error*. A most incomparable delight to build castles in the air, to go smiling to themselves, acting an infinite variety of parts, which they suppose, and strongly imagine, they act, or that they see done. —So delightsome these toys at first, they could spend whole days and nights without sleep, even whole years in such contemplations, and fantastical meditations, which are like so many dreams, and will hardly be drawn from them—winding and unwinding themselves as so many clocks, and still pleasing their humours, until at last the SCENE TURNS UPON A SUDDEN, and they being now habituated to such meditations and solitary places, can endure no company, can think of nothing but harsh and distasteful subjects. Fear, sorrow, suspicion, *subrusticus pudor*, discontent, cares, and weariness of life, surprise them on a sudden, and they can think of nothing else: continually suspecting, no sooner are their eyes open, but this infernal plague of melancholy seizeth on them, and terrifies their souls, representing some dismal object to their minds;

which now, by no means, no labour, no persuasion, they can avoid, they cannot be rid of, they cannot resist."

Something like this "SCENE-TURNING" I have experienced at the evening parties, at the house of my good Catholic friend *Nov*—; who, by the aid of a capital organ, himself the most finished of players, converts his drawing-room into a chapel, his week days into Sundays, and these latter into minor heavens.<sup>1</sup>

When my friend commences upon one of those solemn anthems, which peradventure struck upon my heedless ear, rambling in the side aisles of the dim abbey, some five and thirty years since, waking a new sense, and putting a soul of old religion into my young apprehension—(whether it be *that*, in which the psalmist, weary of the persecutions of bad men, wisheth to himself dove's wings—or *that other*, which, with a like measure of sobriety and pathos, inquireth by what means the young man shall best cleanse his mind)—a holy calm pervadeth me.—I am for the time

—rapt above earth,  
And possess joys not promised at my birth.

But when this master of the spell, not content to have laid a soul prostrate, goes on, in his power, to inflict more bliss than lies in her capacity to receive,

<sup>1</sup> I have been there, and still would go;  
'Tis like a little Heaven below.—*Dr. Watts.*

—impatient to overcome her “earthly” with his “heav-  
enly,”—still pouring in, for protracted hours, fresh  
waves and fresh from the sea of sound, or from that  
inexhausted *German* ocean, above which, in tri-  
umphant progress, dolphin-seated, ride those Arions  
*Haydn and Mozart*, with their attendant tritons, *Bach*,  
*Beethoven*, and a countless tribe, whom to attempt to  
reckon up would but plunge me again in the deeps,—  
I stagger under the weight of harmony, reeling to  
and fro at my wit’s end;—clouds, as of frankincense,  
oppress me—priests, altars, censers, dazzle before me  
—the genius of *his* religion hath me in her toils—  
a shadowy triple tiara invests the brow of my friend,  
late so naked, so ingenuous—he is Pope,—and by him  
sits, like as in the anomaly of dreams, a she-Pope too,  
—tri-coroneted like himself!—I am converted, and  
yet a Protestant;—at once *malleus hereticorum*, and  
myself grand heresiarch: or three heresies centre in  
my person: I am Marcion, Ebion, and Cerinthus—  
Gog and Magog—what not?—till the coming in of  
the friendly supper-tray dissipates the figment, and a  
draught of true Lutheran beer (in which chiefly my  
friend shows himself no bigot) at once reconciles me  
to the rationalities of a purer faith; and restores to  
me the genuine unterrifying aspects of my pleasant-  
countenanced host and hostess.

CHARLES LAMB: *The Essays of Elia.*

## A BACHELOR'S COMPLAINT OF THE BEHAVIOUR OF MARRIED PEOPLE

**A**S a single man, I have spent a good deal of my time in noting down the infirmities of Married People, to console myself for those superior pleasures, which they tell me I have lost by remaining as I am.

I cannot say that the quarrels of men and their wives ever made any great impression upon me, or had much tendency to strengthen me in those anti-social resolutions, which I took up long ago upon more substantial considerations. What oftenest offends me at the houses of married persons where I visit, is an error of quite a different description;—it is that they are too loving.

Not too loving neither: that does not explain my meaning. Besides, why should that offend me? The very act of separating themselves from the rest of the world, to have the fuller enjoyment of each other's society, implies that they prefer one another to all the world.

But what I complain of is, that they carry this preference so undisguisedly, they perk it up in the

faces of us single people so shamelessly, you cannot be in their company a moment without being made to feel, by some indirect hint or open avowal, that *you* are not the object of this preference. Now there are some things which give no offence, while implied or taken for granted merely; but expressed, there is much offence in them. If a man were to accost the first homely-featured or plain-dressed young woman of his acquaintance, and tell her bluntly, that she was not handsome or rich enough for him, and he could not marry her, he would deserve to be kicked for his ill manners; yet no less is implied in the fact, that having access and opportunity of putting the question to her, he has never thought fit to do it. The young woman understands this as clearly as if it were put into words; but no reasonable young woman would think of making this the ground of a quarrel. Just as little right have a married couple to tell me by speeches, and looks that are scarce less plain than speeches, that I am not the happy man,—the lady's choice. It is enough that I know I am not: I do not want this perpetual reminding.

The display of superior knowledge or riches may be made sufficiently mortifying; but these admit of a palliative. The knowledge which is brought out to insult me, may accidentally improve me; and in the rich man's houses and pictures,—his parks and gardens, I have a temporary usufruct at least. But the

display of married happiness has none of these palliatives: it is throughout pure, unrecompensed, unqualified insult.

Marriage by its best title is a monopoly, and not of the least invidious sort. It is the cunning of most possessors of any exclusive privilege to keep their advantage as much out of sight as possible, that their less favoured neighbours, seeing little of the benefit, may the less be disposed to question the right. But these married monopolists thrust the most obnoxious part of their patent into our faces.

Nothing is to me more distasteful than that entire complacency and satisfaction which beam in the countenances of a new-married couple,—in that of the lady particularly: it tells you, that her lot is disposed of in this world; that *you* can have no hopes of her. It is true, I have none; nor wishes either, perhaps: but this is one of those truths which ought, as I said before, to be taken for granted, not expressed.

The excessive airs which those people give themselves, founded on the ignorance of us unmarried people, would be more offensive if they were less irrational. We will allow them to understand the mysteries belonging to their own craft better than we who have not had the happiness to be made free of the company: but their arrogance is not content within these limits. If a single person presume to offer his opinion in their presence, though upon the

most indifferent subject, he is immediately silenced as an incompetent person. Nay, a young married lady of my acquaintance, who, the best of the jest was, had not changed her condition above a fortnight before, in a question on which I had the misfortune to differ from her, respecting the properest mode of breeding oysters for the London market, has the assurance to ask, with a sneer, how such an old Bachelor as I could pretend to know any thing about such matters.

But what I have spoken of hitherto is nothing to the airs which these creatures give themselves when they come, as they generally do, to have children. When I consider how little of a rarity children are,—that every street and blind alley swarms with them,—that the poorest people commonly have them in most abundance,—that there are few marriages that are not blest with at least one of these bargains,—how often they turn out ill, and defeat the fond hopes of their parents, taking to vicious courses, which end in poverty, disgrace, the gallows, &c.—I cannot for my life tell what cause for pride there can possibly be in having them. If they were young phœnixes, indeed, that were born but one in a year, there might be a pretext. But when they are so common—

I do not advert to the insolent merit which they assume with their husbands on these occasions. Let them look to that. But why *we*, who are not their natural-born subjects, should be expected to bring our

spices, myrrh, and incense,—our tribute and homage of admiration,—I do not see.

“Like as the arrows in the hand of the giant, even so are the young children”: so says the excellent office in our Prayer-book appointed for the churhing of women. “Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them:” So say I; but then don’t let him discharge his quiver upon us that are weaponless;—let them be arrows, but not to gall and stick us. I have generally observed that these arrows are double-headed: they have two forks, to be sure to hit with one or the other. As for instance, where you come into a house which is full of children, if you happen to take no notice of them (you are thinking of something else, perhaps, and turn a deaf ear to their innocent caresses), you are set down as untractable, morose, a hater of children. On the other hand, if you find them more than usually engaging,—if you are taken with their pretty manners, and set about in earnest to romp and play with them, some pretext or other is sure to be found for sending them out of the room: they are too noisy or boisterous, or Mr.— does not like children. With one or other of these forks the arrow is sure to hit you.

I could forgive their jealousy, and dispense with toying with their brats, if it gives them any pain; but I think it unreasonable to be called upon to *love* them, where I see no occasion,—to love a whole fam-

ily, perhaps, eight, nine, or ten, indiscriminately,—to love all the pretty dears, because children are so engaging.

I know there is a proverb, “Love me, love my dog”; that is not always so very practicable, particularly if the dog be set upon you to tease you or snap at you in sport. But a dog, or a lesser thing,—any inanimate substance, as a keepsake, a watch or a ring, a tree, or the place where we last parted when my friend went away upon a long absence, I can make shift to love, because I love him, and anything that reminds me of him; provided it be in its nature indifferent, and apt to receive whatever hue fancy can give it. But children have a real character and an essential being of themselves: they are amiable or unamiable *per se*; I must love or hate them as I see cause for either in their qualities. A child’s nature is too serious a thing to admit of its being regarded as a mere appendage to another being, and to be loved or hated accordingly: they stand with me upon their own stock, as much as men and women do. O! but you will say, sure it is an attractive age,—there is something in the tender years of infancy that of itself charms us. That is the very reason why I am more nice about them. I know that a sweet child is the sweetest thing in nature, not even excepting the delicate creatures which bear them; but the prettier the kind of a thing is, the more desirable it is that it

should be pretty of its kind. One daisy differs not much from another in glory; but a violet should look and smell the daintiest.—I was always rather squeamish in my women and children.

But this is not the worst: one must be admitted into their familiarity, at least, before they can complain of inattention. It implies visits, and some kind of intercourse. But if the husband be a man with whom you have lived on a friendly footing before marriage,—if you did not come in on the wife's side,—if you did not sneak into the house in her train, but were an old friend in fast habits of intimacy before their courtship was so much as thought on,—look about you—your tenure is precarious—before a twelvemonth shall roll over your head, you shall find your old friend gradually grow cool and altered towards you, and at last seek opportunities of breaking with you. I have scarce a married friend of my acquaintance, upon whose firm faith I can rely, whose friendship did not commence *after the period of his marriage*. With some limitations they can endure that: but that the good man should have dared to enter into a solemn league of friendship in which they were not consulted, though it happened before they knew him,—before they that are now man and wife ever met,—this is intolerable to them. Every long friendship, every old authentic intimacy, must be brought into their office to be new stamped

with their currency, as a sovereign Prince calls in the good old money that was coined in some reign before he was born or thought of, to be new marked and minted with the stamp of his authority, before he will let it pass current in the world. You may guess what luck generally befalls such a rusty piece of metal as I am in these *new mintings*.

Innumerable are the ways which they take to insult and worm you out of their husband's confidence. Laughing at all you say with a kind of wonder, as if you were a queer kind of fellow that said good things, *but an oddity*, is one of the ways!—they have a particular kind of stare for the purpose;—till at last the husband, who used to defer to your judgment, and would pass over some excrescences of understanding and manner for the sake of a general vein of observation (not quite vulgar) which he perceived in you, begins to suspect whether you are not altogether a humourist,—a fellow well enough to have consorted with in his bachelor days, but not quite so proper to be introduced to ladies. This may be called the staring way; and is that which has oftenest been put in practice against me.

Then there is the exaggerating way, or the way of irony: that is, where they find you an object of especial regard with their husband, who is not so easily to be shaken from the lasting attachment founded on esteem which he has conceived towards

you; by never-qualified exaggerations to cry up all that you say or do, till the good man, who understands well enough that it is all done in compliment to him, grows weary of the debt of gratitude which is due to so much candour, and by relaxing a little on his part, and taking down a peg or two in his enthusiasm, sinks at length to that kindly level of moderate esteem,—that “decent affection and complacent kindness” towards you, where she herself can join in sympathy with him without much stretch and violence to her sincerity.

Another way (for the ways they have to accomplish so desirable a purpose are infinite) is, with a kind of innocent simplicity, continually to mistake what it was which first made their husband fond of you. If an esteem for something excellent in your moral character was that which riveted the chain which she is to break, upon any imaginary discovery of a want of poignancy in your conversations, she will cry, “I thought, my dear, you described your friend, Mr.—, as a great wit.” If, on the other hand, it was for some supposed charm in your conversation that he first grew to like you, and was content for this to overlook some trifling irregularities in your moral deportment, upon the first notice of any of these she as readily exclaims, “This, my dear, is your good Mr.—.” One good lady whom I took the liberty

of expostulating with for not showing me quite so much respect as I thought due to her husband's old friend, had the candour to confess to me that she had often heard Mr.— speak of me before marriage, and that she had conceived a great desire to be acquainted with me, but that the sight of me had very much disappointed her expectations; for from her husband's representations of me, she had formed a notion that she was to see a fine, tall, officer-like looking man (I use her very words); the very reverse of which proved to be the truth. This was candid; and I had the civility not to ask her in return, how she came to pitch upon a standard of personal accomplishments for her husband's friends which differed so much from his own; for my friend's dimensions as near as possible approximate to mine; he standing five feet five in his shoes, in which I have the advantage of him by about half an inch; and he no more than myself exhibiting any indications of a martial character in his air or countenance.

These are some of the mortifications which I have encountered in the absurd attempt to visit at their houses. To enumerate them all would be a vain endeavour: I shall therefore just glance at the very common impropriety of which married ladies are guilty,—of treating us as if we were their husbands, and *vice versa*. I mean, when they use us with famil-

arity, and their husbands with ceremony. *Testacea*, for instance, kept me the other night two or three hours beyond my usual time of supping, while she was fretting because Mr.— did not come home till the oysters were all spoiled, rather than she would be guilty of the impoliteness of touching one in his absence. This was reversing the point of good manners: for ceremony is an invention to take off the uneasy feeling which we derive from knowing ourselves to be less the object of love and esteem with a fellow-creature than some other person is. It endeavours to make up, by superior attentions in little points, for that invidious preference which it is forced to deny in the greater. Had *Testacea* kept the oysters back for me, and withstood her husband's importunities to go to supper, she would have acted according to the strict rules of propriety. I know no ceremony that ladies are bound to observe to their husbands, beyond the point of a modest behaviour and decorum: therefore I must protest against the vicarious gluttony of *Cerasia*, who at her own table sent away a dish of Morellas, which I was applying to with great good will, to her husband at the other end of the table, and recommended a plate of less extraordinary gooseberries to my unwedded palate in their stead. Neither can I excuse the wanton affront of —.

But I am weary of stringing up all my married

acquaintance by Roman denominations. Let them amend and change their manners, or I promise to record the full-length English of their names, to the terror of all such desperate offenders in future.

CHARLES LAMB: *The Essays of Elia.*

## THAT WE SHOULD LIE DOWN WITH THE LAMB

WE could never quite understand the philosophy of this arrangement, or the wisdom of our ancestors in sending us for instruction to these woolly bedfellows. A sheep, when it is dark, has nothing to do but to shut his silly eyes, and sleep if he can. Man found out long sixes.—Hail, candle-light! without disparagement to sun or moon, the kindest luminary of the three—if we may not rather style thee their radiant deputy, mild viceroy of the moon!—We love to read, talk, sit silent, eat, drink, sleep, by candle-light. They are everybody's sun and moon. This is our peculiar and household planet. Wanting it, what savage unsocial nights must our ancestors have spent, wintering in caves and unillumined fastnesses! They must have lain about and grumbled at one another in the dark. What repartees could have passed, when you must have felt about for a smile, and handled a neighbor's cheek to be sure that he understood it? This accounts for the seriousness of the elder poetry. It has a sombre cast (try Hesiod or Ossian), derived from the tradition of those unlantern'd nights. Jokes

came in with candles. We wonder how they saw to pick up a pin, if they had any. How did they sup? what a mélange of chance carving they must have made of it?—here one had got a leg of a goat when he wanted a horse's shoulder—there another had dipped his scooped palm in a kid-skin of wild honey, when he meditated right mare's milk. There is neither good eating nor drinking in fresco. Who, even in these civilized times, has never experienced this, when at some economic table he has commenced dining after dusk, and waited for the flavor till the lights came? The senses absolutely give and take reciprocally. Can you tell pork from veal in the dark? or distinguish Sherris from pure Malaga? Take away the candle from the smoking man; by the glimmering of the left ashes, he knows that he is still smoking, but he knows it only by an inference; till the restored light, coming in aid of the olfactories, reveals to both senses the full aroma. Then how he redoubles his puffs! how he burnishes!—There is absolutely no such thing as reading but by a candle. We have tried the affectation of a book at noon-day in gardens, and in sultry arbors; but it was labor thrown away. Those gay motes in the beam come about you, hovering and teasing, like so many coquettes, that will have you all to their self and are jealous of your abstractions. By the midnight taper, the writer digests his meditations. By the same light we must approach to their

perusal, if we would catch the flame, the odor. It is a mockery, all that is reported of the influential Phœbus. No true poem ever owed its birth to the sun's light. They are abstracted works—

Things that were born, when none but the still night,  
And his dumb candle, saw his pinching throes.

Marry, daylight—daylight might furnish the images, the crude material; but for the fine shapings, the true meaning and filing (as mine author hath it), they must be content to hold their inspiration of the candle. The mild internal light, that reveals them, like fires on the domestic hearth, goes out in the sunshine. Night and silence call out the starry fancies. Milton's Morning Hymn in Paradise, we would hold a good wager, was penned at midnight; and Taylor's rich description of a sunrise smells decidedly of the taper. Even ourself, in these our humbler lucubrations, tune our best-measured cadences (Prose has her cadences) not unfrequently to the charm of the drowsier watchman, "blessing the doors"; or the wild sweep of winds at midnight. Even now a loftier speculation than we have yet attempted, courts our endeavors. We would indite something about the Solar system.—*Betty, bring the candles.*

CHARLES LAMB: *Familiar Proverbs Refuted.*

## THAT ENOUGH IS AS GOOD AS A FEAST

NOT a man, woman, or child, in ten miles round Guildhall, who really believes this saying. The inventor of it did not believe it himself. It was made in revenge by somebody, who was disappointed of a regale. It is a vile cold-srag-of-mutton sophism; a lie palmed upon the palate, which knows better things. If nothing else could be said for a feast, this is sufficient—that from the superflux there is usually something left for the next day. Morally interpreted, it belongs to a class of proverbs which have a tendency to make us undervalue *money*. Of this cast are those notable observations, that money is not health; riches cannot purchase everything: the metaphor which makes gold to be mere muck, with the morality which traces fine clothing to the sheep's back, and denounces pearl as the unhandsome excretion of an oyster. Hence, too, the phrase which imputes dirt to acres—a sophistry so barefaced that even the literal sense of it is true only in a wet season. This, and abundance of similar sage saws assuming to inculcate *content*, we verily believe to have been the invention of some cunning borrower, who had

designs upon the purse of his wealthier neighbor, which he could only hope to carry by force of these verbal jugglings. Translate any one of these sayings out of the artful metonymy which envelopes it, and the trick is apparent. Goodly legs and shoulders of mutton, exhilarating cordials, books, pictures, the opportunities of seeing foreign countries, independence, heart's ease, a man's own time to himself, are not *muck*—however we may be pleased to scandalize with that appellation the faithful metal that provides them for us.

CHARLES LAMB: *Familiar Proverbs Refuted.*

## ELIA IS REPENTANT

DEAR SIR—It is an observation of a wise man that “moderation is best in all things.” I cannot agree with him “in liquor.” There is a smoothness and oiliness in wine that makes it go down by a natural channel, which I am positive was made for that descending. Else, why does not wine choke us? could Nature have made that sloping lane, not to facilitate the down-going? She does nothing in vain. You know that better than I. You know how often she has helped you at a dead lift, and how much better entitled she is to a fee than yourself sometimes, when you carry off the credit. Still there is something due to manners and customs, and I should apologise to you and Mrs. Asbury for being absolutely carried home upon a man’s shoulders thro’ Silver Street, up Parson’s Lane, by the Chapels (which might have taught me better), and then to be deposited like a dead log at Gaffar Westwood’s, who it seems does not “insure” against intoxication. Not that the mode of conveyance is objectionable. On the contrary, it is more easy than a one-horse chaise. Ariel in the *Tempest* says

On a Bat's back do I fly, after sunset merrily.

Now I take it that Ariel must sometimes have stayed out late of nights. Indeed, he pretends that "where the bee sucks, there lurks he," as much as to say that his suction is as innocent as that little innocent (but damnably stinging when he is provok'd) winged creature. But I take it, that Ariel was fond of metheglin, of which the Bees are notorious Brewers. But then you will say: What a shocking sight to see a middle-aged gentleman-and-a-half riding upon a Gentleman's back up Parson's Lane at midnight! Exactly the time for that sort of conveyance, when nobody can see him, nobody but Heaven and his own conscience; now Heaven makes fools, and don't expect much from her own creation; and as for conscience, She and I have long since come to a compromise. I have given up false modesty, and she allows me to abate a little of the true. I like to be liked, but I don't care about being respected. I don't respect myself. But, as I was saying, I thought he would have let me down just as we got to Lieutenant Barker's Coal-shed (or emporium), but by a cunning jerk I eased myself, and righted my posture. I protest, I thought myself in a palanquin, and never felt myself so grandly carried. It was a slave under me. There was I, all but my reason. And what is reason? and what is the loss of it? and how often in a day do we do without it,

just as well? Reason is only counting, two and two makes four. And if on my passage home, I thought it made five, what matter? Two and two will just make four, as it always did, before I took the finishing glass that did my business. My sister has begged me to write an apology to Mrs. A. and you for disgracing your party; now it does seem to me, that I rather honoured your party, for every one that was not drunk (and one or two of the ladies, I am sure, were not) must have been set off greatly in the contrast to me. I was the scapegoat. The soberer they seemed. . . . But still you will say (or the men and maids at your house will say) that it is not a seemly sight for an old gentleman to go home pick-a-pack. Well, may be it is not. But I never studied grace. I take it to be a mere superficial accomplishment. I regard more the internal acquisitions. The great object after supper is to get home, and whether that is obtained in a horizontal posture or perpendicular (as foolish men and apes affect for dignity), I think is little to the purpose. The end is always greater than the means. Here I am, able to compose a sensible rational apology, and what signifies how I got here? I have just sense enough to remember I was very happy last night, and to thank our kind host and hostess, and that's sense enough, I hope.

CHARLES LAMB.

*N.B.*—What is good for a desperate head-ache? Why, patience, and a determination not to mind being miserable all day long. And that I have made my mind up to. So, here goes. It is better than not being alive at all, which I might have been, had your man toppled me down at Lieut. Barker's Coal-shed. My sister sends her sober compliments to Mrs. A. She is not much the worse.—Yours truly,

C. LAMB.

CHARLES LAMB: *Letters.*

## DREAM-CHILDREN: A REVERIE

CHILDREN love to listen to stories about their elders, when *they* were children: to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how

beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining county; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, "that would be foolish, indeed." And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psaltery by heart, ay, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was: and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little

right foot played an involuntary movement, till upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the country, till a cruel disease, called cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said “those innocents would do her no harm”; and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grandchildren, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the twelve Cæsars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I could never be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to my-

self, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew-trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes which, not unobserved by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grandchildren, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L——, because he was so

handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries—and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain;—and how in after-life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowance enough for him when he was impatient, and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterwards it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much

I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him (for we quarrelled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he, their poor uncle, must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a-crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up, and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty dead mother. Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: “We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been,

and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages, before we have existence, and a name"—and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side—but John L. (or James Elia) was gone forever.

CHARLES LAMB: *The Essays of Elia.*

## ON THE FEELING OF IMMORTALITY IN YOUTH

Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us.

—SIR THOMAS BROWNE.

**N**O young man believes he shall ever die. It was a saying of my brother's, and a fine one. There is a feeling of Eternity in youth, which makes us amends for everything. To be young is to be as one of the Immortal Gods. One half of time indeed is flown—the other half remains in store for us with all its countless treasures; for there is no line drawn, and we see no limit to our hopes and wishes. We make the coming age our own.

The vast, the unbounded prospect lies before us.

Death, old age, are words without a meaning, that pass by us like the idle air which we regard not. Others may have undergone, or may still be liable to them—we “bear a charmed life,” which laughs to scorn all such sickly fancies. As in setting out on a delightful journey, we strain our eager gaze forward—

Bidding the lovely scenes at distance hail,

and see no end to the landscape, new objects presenting themselves as we advance; so, in the commencement of life, we set no bounds to our inclinations, nor to the unrestricted opportunities of gratifying them. We have as yet found no obstacle, no disposition to flag; and it seems that we can go on so forever. We look round in a new world, full of life, and motion, and ceaseless progress; and feel in ourselves all the vigour and spirit to keep pace with it, and do not foresee from any present symptoms how we shall be left behind in the natural course of things, decline into old age, and drop into the grave. It is the simplicity, and as it were *abstractedness* of our feelings in youth, that (so to speak) identifies us with nature, and (our experience being slight and our passions strong) deludes us into a belief of being immortal like it. Our short-lived connection with existence, we fondly flatter ourselves, is an indissoluble and lasting union—a honeymoon that knows neither coldness, jar, nor separation. As infants smile and sleep, we are rocked in the cradle of our wayward fancies, and lulled into security by the roar of the universe around us—we quaff the cup of life with eager haste without draining it, instead of which it only overflows the more—objects press around us, filling the mind with their magnitude and with the throng of desires that wait

upon them, so that we have no room for the thoughts of death. From the plenitude of our being we cannot change all at once to dust and ashes, we cannot imagine "this sensible, warm motion, to become a kneaded clod"—we are too much dazzled by the brightness of the waking dream around us to look into the darkness of the tomb. We no more see our end than our beginning: the one is lost in oblivion and vacancy, as the other is hid from us by the crowd and hurry of approaching events. Or the grim shadow is seen lingering in the horizon, which we are doomed never to overtake, or whose last, faint, glimmering outline touches upon Heaven and translates us to the skies! Nor would the hold that life has taken of us permit us to detach our thoughts from the present objects and pursuits, even if we would. What is there more opposed to health, than sickness; to strength and beauty, than decay and dissolution; to the active search of knowledge, than mere oblivion? Or is there none of the usual advantage to bar the approach of Death, and mock his idle threats; Hope supplies their place, and draws a veil over the abrupt termination of all our cherished schemes. While the spirit of youth remains unimpaired, ere the "wine of life is drank up," we are like people intoxicated or in a fever, who are hurried away by the violence of their own sensations; it is only as present objects begin to pall upon the sense, as we have been disappointed in our

favourite pursuits, cut off from our closest ties, that passion loosens its hold upon the breast, that we by degrees become weaned from the world, and allow ourselves to contemplate, "as in a glass, darkly," the possibility of parting with it for good. The example of others, the voice of experience, has no effect upon us whatever. Casualties we must avoid: the slow and deliberate advances of age we can play at *hide-and-seek* with. We think ourselves too lusty and too nimble for that blear-eyed decrepid old gentleman to catch us. Like the foolish fat scullion, in Sterne, when she hears that Master Bobby is dead, our only reflection is, "So am not I!" The idea of death, instead of staggering our confidence, rather seems to strengthen and enhance our possession and our enjoyment of life. Others may fall around like leaves, or be mowed down like flowers by the scythe of Time: these are but tropes and figures to the unreflecting ears and overweening presumption of youth. It is not till we see the flowers of Love, Hope, and Joy, withering around us, and our own pleasures cut up by the roots, that we bring the moral home to ourselves, that we abate something of the wanton extravagance of our pretensions, or that the emptiness and dreariness of the prospect before us reconciles us to the stillness of the grave!

WILLIAM HAZLITT: *On the Feeling of Immortality in Youth.*

## HAMLET

**T**HIS is that Hamlet the Dane, whom we read of in our youth, and whom we may be said almost to remember in our after years; he who made that famous soliloquy on life, who gave the advice to the players, who thought “this goodly frame, the earth, a sterl promontory, and this brave o'erhanging firmament, the air, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours”; whom “man delighted not, nor woman neither”; he who talked with the grave-diggers, and moralised on Yorick’s skull; the school-fellow of Rosencrans and Guildenstern at Wittenberg; the friend of Horatio; the lover of Ophelia; he that was mad and sent to England; the slow avenger of his father’s death; who lived at the court of Horwendiflus five hundred years before we were born, but all whose thoughts we seem to know as well as we do our own, because we have read them in Shakespeare.

Hamlet is a name; his speeches and sayings but the idle coinage of the poet’s brain. What then, are they not real? They are as real as our own thoughts. Their

reality is in the reader's mind. It is *we* who are Hamlet. This play has a prophetic truth, which is above that of history. Whoever has become thoughtful and melancholy through his own mishaps or those of others; whoever has borne about with him the clouded brow of reflection, and thought himself "too much i' th' sun"; whoever has seen the golden lamp of day dimmed by envious mists rising in his own breast, and could find in the world before him only a dull blank with nothing left remarkable in it; whoever has known "the pangs of despised love, the insolence of office, or the spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes"; he who has felt his mind sink within him, and sadness cling to his heart like a malady, who has had his hopes blighted and his youth staggered by the apparitions of strange things; who cannot be well at ease, while he sees evil hovering near him like a spectre; whose powers of action have been eaten up by thought, he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing; whose bitterness of soul makes him careless of consequences, and who goes to a play as his best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock representation of them—this is the true Hamlet.

We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces. But we must make such observations as we can. It is one of Shake-

speare's plays that we think of the oftenest, because it abounds most in striking reflections on human life, and because the distresses of Hamlet are transferred, by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it to himself as a means of general reasoning. He is a great moraliser; and what makes him worth attending to is, that he moralises on his own feelings and experience. He is not a commonplace pedant. If *Lear* shews the greatest depth of passion, *Hamlet* is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality, and unstudied development of character. Shakespeare had more magnanimity than any other poet, and he has shown more of it in this play than in any other. There is no attempt to force an interest: everything is left for time and circumstances to unfold. The attention is excited without effort, the incidents succeed each other as matters of course, the characters think and speak and act just as they might do, if left entirely to themselves. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations are suggested by the passing scene—the gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. The whole play is an exact transcript of what might be supposed to have taken place at the court of Denmark, at the remote period of time fixed upon, before the modern refinements in morals and manners were heard of. It would have been interest-

ing enough to have been admitted as a by-stander in such a scene, at such a time, to have heard and seen something of what was going on. But here we are more than spectators. We have not only "the outward pageants and the signs of grief"; but "we have that within which passes show." We read the thoughts of the heart, we catch the passions living as they rise. Other dramatic writers give us very fine versions and paraphrases of nature: but Shakespeare, together with his own comments, gives us the original text, that we may judge for ourselves. This is a very great advantage.

The character of Hamlet stands quite by itself. It is not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be: but he is a young and princely novice, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances, questioning with fortune and refining on his own feelings, and forced from the natural bias of his disposition by the strangeness of his situation. He seems incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect, as in the scene where he kills Polonius, and again, where he alters the letters which Rosencrans and Guildenstern are taking with them to England, purporting his death. At other times, when he is most bound to act, he remains

puzzled, undecided, and sceptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and always finds some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtlessness again. For this reason he refuses to kill the King when he is at his prayers, and by a refinement in malice, which is in truth only an excuse for his own want of resolution, defers his revenge to some more fatal opportunity, when he shall be engaged in some act “that has no relish of salvation in it.”

He kneels and prays,  
And now I'll do 't, and so he goes to heaven,  
And so am I reveng'd: *that would be scanned.*  
He kill'd my father, and for that,  
I, his sole son, send him to heaven.  
Why this is reward, not revenge.  
Up sword and know thou a more horrid time,  
When he is drunk, asleep, or in a rage.

He is the prince of philosophical speculators, and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form, he misses it altogether. So he scruples to trust the suggestions of the Ghost, contrives the scene of the play to have surer proof of his uncle's guilt, and then rests satisfied with this confirmation of his suspicions, and the success of his experiment, instead of acting upon it. Yet he is sensible of his own weakness, taxes himself with it, and tries to reason himself out of it.

How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast; no more.  
Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
That capability and god-like reason  
To rust in us unus'd: now whether it be  
Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple  
Of thinking too precisely on th' event,—  
A thought which quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom,  
And ever three parts coward;—I do not know  
Why yet I live to say, this thing's to do;  
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means  
To do it. Examples gross as earth excite me:  
Witness this army of such mass and charge,  
Led by a delicate and tender prince,  
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd,  
Makes mouths at the invisible event,  
Exposing what is mortal and unsure  
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,  
Even for an egg-shell. 'Tis not to be great,  
Never to stir without great argument;  
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,  
When honour's at the stake. How stand I then,  
That have a father kill'd, a mother stain'd,  
Excitements of my reason and my blood,  
And let all sleep, while to my shame I see  
The imminent death of twenty thousand men,  
That fantasy and trick of fame,

Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot  
Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,  
Which is not tomb enough and continent  
To hide the slain?—O, from this time forth,  
My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.

Still he does nothing; and this very speculation on his own infirmity only affords him another occasion for indulging it. It is not for any want of attachment to his father or abhorrence of his murder that Hamlet is thus dilatory, but it is more to his taste to indulge his imagination in reflecting upon the enormity of the crime and refining on his schemes of vengeance, than to put them into immediate practice. His ruling passion is to think, not to act: and any vague pretence that flatters this propensity instantly diverts him from his previous purposes.

The moral perfection of this character has been called in question, we think, by those who did not understand it. It is more interesting than according to rules: amiable, though not faultless. The ethical delineations of “that noble and liberal casuist” (as Shakespeare has been well called) do not exhibit the drab-coloured quakerism of morality. His plays are not copied either from the *Whole Duty of Man* or from *The Academy of Compliments!* We confess, we are a little shocked at the want of refinement in those who are shocked at the want of refinement in

Hamlet. The want of punctilious exactness in his behaviour either partakes of the "license of the time," or else belongs to the very excess of intellectual refinement in the character which makes the common rules of life, as well as his own purposes, sit loose upon him. He may be said to be amenable only to the tribunal of his own thoughts, and is too much taken up with the airy world of contemplation to lay as much stress as he ought on the practical consequences of things. His habitual principles of action are unhinged and out of joint with the time. His conduct to Ophelia is quite natural in his circumstances. It is that of assumed severity only. It is the effect of disappointed hope, of bitter regrets, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distractions of the scene around him! Amidst the natural and preternatural horrors of his situation, he might be excused in delicacy from carrying on a regular courtship. When "his father's spirit was in arms," it was not a time for the son to make love in. He could neither marry Ophelia, nor wound her mind by explaining the cause of his alienation, which he durst hardly trust himself to think of. It would have taken him years to have come to a direct explanation on the point. In the harassed state of his mind, he could not have done otherwise than he did. His conduct does not contradict what he says when he sees her funeral,

I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers  
Could not with all their quantity of love  
Make up my sum.

Nothing can be more affecting or beautiful than the Queen's apostrophe to Ophelia on throwing the flowers into the grave.

Sweets to the sweet, farewell.

I hop'd thou should'st have been my Hamlet's wife:  
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,  
And not have strew'd thy grave.

Shakespeare was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of human character, and he here shews us the Queen, who was so criminal in some respects, not without sensibility and affection in other relations of life.—Ophelia is a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon. O rose of May, O flower too soon faded! Her love, her madness, her death, are described with the truest touches of tenderness and pathos. It is a character which nobody but Shakespeare could have drawn in the way that he has done, and to the conception of which there is not even the smallest approach, except in some of the old romantic ballads.<sup>1</sup> Her brother, Laertes, is a character

<sup>1</sup> In the account of her death, a friend has pointed out an instance of the poet's exact observation of nature:—

“There is a willow growing o'er a brook,  
That shows its hoary leaves i' th' glassy stream.”

The inside of the leaves of the willow, next the water, is of a whitish colour, and the reflection would therefore be “hoary.”

we do not like so well: he is too hot and choleric, and somewhat rhodomontade. Polonius is a perfect character in its kind; nor is there any foundation for the objections which have been made to the consistency of this part. It is said that he acts very foolishly and talks very sensibly. There is no inconsistency in that. Again, that he talks wisely at one time and foolishly at another; that his advice to Laertes is very sensible, and his advice to the King and Queen on the subject of Hamlet's madness very ridiculous. But he gives the one as a father, and is sincere in it; he gives the other as a mere courtier, a busy-body, and is accordingly officious, garrulous, and impertinent. In short, Shakespeare has been accused of inconsistency in this and other characters, only because he has kept up the distinction which there is in nature, between the understandings and the moral habits of men, between the absurdity of their ideas and the absurdity of their motives. Polonius is not a fool, but he makes himself so. His folly, whether in his actions or speeches, comes under the head of impropriety of intention.

We do not like to see our author's plays acted, and least of all, *Hamlet*. There is no play that suffers so much in being transferred to the stage. Hamlet himself seems hardly capable of being acted. Mr. Kemble unavoidably fails in this character from a want of ease and variety. The character of Hamlet is made up

upon undulating lines; it has the yielding flexibility of "a wave o' th' sea." Mr. Kemble plays it like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose, in one undeviating straight line, which is as remote from the natural grace and refined susceptibility of the character, as the sharp angles and abrupt starts which Mr. Kean introduces into the part. Mr. Kean's Hamlet is as much too splenetic and rash as Mr. Kemble's is too deliberate and formal. His manner is too strong and pointed. He throws a severity, approaching to virulence, into the common observations and answers. There is nothing of this in *Hamlet*. He is, as it were, wrapped up in his reflections, and only *thinks aloud*. There should therefore be no attempt to impress what he says upon others by a studied exaggeration of emphasis or manner; no *talking at* his hearers. There should be as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible infused into the part, and as little of the actor. A pensive air of sadness should sit reluctantly upon his brow, but no appearance of fixed and sullen gloom. He is full of weakness and melancholy, but there is no harshness in his nature. He is the most amiable of misanthropes.

WILLIAM HAZLITT: *Hamlet*.

## THE BRONTE SISTERS

MY sister Emily first declined. The details of her illness are deep-branded in my memory, but to dwell on them, either in thought or narrative, is not in my power. Never in all her life had she lingered over any task that lay before her, and she did not linger now. She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us. Yet, while physically she perished, mentally she grew stronger than we had yet known her. Day by day when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love. I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was, that while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hand, the unnerved limbs, the faded eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health. To stand by and witness this, and not dare to remonstrate, was a pain no words can render.

Two cruel months of hope and fear passed painfully by, and the day came at last when the terrors

and pains of death were to be undergone by this treasure, which had grown dearer and dearer to our hearts as it wasted before our eyes. Towards the decline of that day, we had nothing of Emily but her mortal remains as consumption left them. She died December 19, 1848.

We thought this enough: but we were utterly and presumptuously wrong. She was not buried ere Anne fell ill. She had not been committed to the grave a fortnight, before we received distinct intimation that it was necessary to prepare our minds to see the younger sister go after the elder. Accordingly, she followed in the same path with slower step, and with a patience that equalled the other's fortitude. I have said that she was religious, and it was by leaning on those Christian doctrines in which she firmly believed, that she found support through her most painful journey. I witnessed their efficacy in her latest hour and greatest trial, and must bear my testimony to the calm triumph with which they brought her through. She died May 28, 1849.

What more shall I say about them? I cannot and need not say much more. In externals, they were two unobtrusive women; a perfectly secluded life gave them retiring manners and habits. In Emily's nature the extremes of vigor and simplicity seemed to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, inartificial tastes, and an unpretending outside, lay a secret power and

fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero; but she had no worldly wisdom; her powers were unadapted to the practical business of life; she would fail to defend her most manifest rights, to consult her most legitimate advantage. An interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world. Her will was not very flexible, and it generally opposed her interests. Her temper was magnanimous, but warm and sudden; her spirit altogether unbending.

Anne's character was milder and more subdued; she wanted the power, the fire, the originality of her sister, but was well endowed with quiet virtues of her own. Long-suffering, self-denying, reflective, and intelligent, a constitutional reserve and taciturnity placed and kept her in the shade, and covered her mind, and especially her feelings, with a sort of nun-like veil, which was rarely lifted. Neither Emily nor Anne was learned; they had no thought of filling their pitchers at the well-spring of other minds; they always wrote from the impulse of nature, the dictates of intuition, and from such stores of observation as their limited experience had enabled them to amass. I may sum up all by saying that for strangers they were nothing, for superficial observers less than nothing; but for those who had known them all their lives in the intimacy of close relationship, they were genuinely good and truly great.

This notice has been written, because I felt it a sacred duty to wipe the dust off their gravestones, and leave their dear names free from soil.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË: *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell.*

## SOMEBODY WHOM NOBODY KNOWS

THAT pretty little house, the last in Pocklington Square, was lately occupied by a young widow lady who wore a pink bonnet, a short silk dress, sustained by crinoline, and a light blue mantle, or over-jacket (Miss C. is not here to tell me the name of the garment); or else a black velvet pelisse, a yellow shawl, and a white bonnet; or else—but never mind the dress, which seemed to be of the handsomest sort money could buy—and who had very long glossy black ringlets, and a peculiarly brilliant complexion,—No. 96 Pocklington Square, I say, was lately occupied by a widow lady named Mrs. Stafford Molyneux.

The very first day on which an intimate and valued female friend of mine saw Mrs. Stafford Molyneux stepping into a brougham, with a splendid bay horse, and without a footman (mark, if you please, that delicate sign of respectability), and after a moment's examination of Mrs. S. M.'s toilette, her manners, little dog, carnation-coloured parasol, etc., Miss Elizabeth Clapperclaw clapped to the opera-glass with which she had been regarding the new inhabitant of Our Street, came away from the window in a great

flurry, and began poking her fire in a fit of virtuous indignation.

“She’s very pretty,” said I, who had been looking over Miss C.’s shoulder at the widow with the flashing eyes and drooping ringlets.

“Hold your tongue, sir,” said Miss Clapperclaw, tossing up her virgin head with an indignant blush on her nose. “It’s a sin and a shame that such a creature should be riding in her carriage, forsooth, when honest people must go on foot.”

Subsequent observations confirmed my revered fellow-lodger’s anger and opinion. We have watched hansom cabs standing before that lady’s house for hours; we have seen broughams, with great flaring eyes, keeping watch there in the darkness; we have seen the vans from the comestible-shops drive up and discharge loads of wines, groceries, French plums, and other articles of luxurious horror. We have seen Count Wowski’s drag, Lord Martingale’s carriage, Mr. Deuceace’s cab drive up there time after time; and (having remarked previously the pastrycook’s men arrive with the trays and entrées) we have known that this widow was giving dinners at the little house in Pocklington Square—dinners such as decent people could not hope to enjoy.

My excellent friend has been in a perfect fury when Mrs. Stafford Molyneux, in a black velvet riding-habit, with a hat and feather, has come out

and mounted an odious grey horse, and has cantered down the street, followed by her groom upon a bay.

"It won't last long—it must end in shame and humiliation," my dear Miss C. has remarked, disappointed that the tiles and chimney-pots did not fall down upon Mrs. Stafford Molyneux's head, and crush that cantering, audacious woman.

But it was a consolation to see her when she walked out with a French maid, a couple of children, and a little dog hanging on to her by a blue ribbon. She always held down her head then—her head with the drooping black ringlets. The virtuous and well-disposed avoided her. I have seen the Square-keeper himself look puzzled as she passed; and Lady Kicklebury walking by with Miss K., her daughter, turn away from Mrs. Stafford Molyneux, and fling back at her a ruthless Parthian glance that ought to have killed any woman of decent sensibility.

That wretched woman, meanwhile, with her rouged cheeks (for rouge it *is*, Miss Clapperclaw swears, and who is a better judge?) has walked on conscious, and yet somehow braving out the Street. You could read pride of her beauty, pride of her fine clothes, shame of her position, in her downcast black eyes.

As for Mademoiselle Trampoline, her French maid, she would stare the sun itself out of countenance. One day she tossed up her head as she passed

under our windows with a look of scorn that drove Miss Clapperclaw back to the fireplace again.

It was Mrs. Stafford Molyneux's children, however, whom I pitied the most. Once her boy, in a flaring tartan, went up to speak to Master Roderick Lacy, whose maid was engaged ogling a policeman; and the children were going to make friends, being united with a hoop which Master Molyneux had, when Master Roderick's maid, rushing up, clutched her charge to her arms, and hurried away, leaving little Molyneux sad and wondering.

“Why won't he play with me, mamma?” Master Molyneux asked—and his mother's face blushed purple as she walked away.

“Ah—Heaven help us and forgive us!” said I; but Miss C. can never forgive the mother or child; and she clapped her hands for joy one day when we saw the shutters up, bills in the windows, a carpet hanging out over the balcony, and a crowd of shabby Jews about the steps—giving token that the reign of Mrs. Stafford Molyneux was over. The pastrycooks and their trays, the bay and the grey, the brougham and the groom, the noblemen and their cabs, were all gone; and the tradesmen in the neighbourhood were crying out that they were done.

“Serve the odious minx right!” says Miss C.; and she played at picquet that night with more vigour than I have known her manifest for these last ten years.

What is it that makes certain old ladies so savage upon certain subjects? Miss C. is a good woman; pays her rent and her tradesmen; gives plenty to the poor; is brisk with her tongue—kind-hearted in the main; but if Mrs. Stafford Molyneux and her children were plunged into a cauldron of boiling vinegar, I think my revered friend would not take her out.

W. M. THACKERAY: *Christmas Books*. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company.

## MAHOMET

**T**HIS Mahomet, then, we will in no wise consider as an Inanity and Theatricality, a poor conscious ambitious schemer; we cannot conceive him so. The rude message he delivered was a real one withal; an earnest confused voice from the unknown Deep. The man's words were not false, nor his workings here below; no Inanity and Simulacrum; a fiery mass of Life cast-up from the great bosom of Nature herself. To *kindle* the world; the world's Maker had ordered it so. Neither can the faults, imperfections, insincerities even, of Mahomet, if such were never so well proved against him, shake this primary fact about him.

On the whole, we make too much of faults; the details of the business hide the real centre of it. Faults? The greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none. Readers of the Bible above all, one would think, might know better. Who is called there "the man according to God's own heart"? David, the Hebrew King, had fallen into sins enough; blackest crimes; there was no want of sins. And thereupon the unbelievers sneer and ask, Is this your

man according to God's heart? The sneer, I must say, seems to me but a shallow one. What are faults, what are the outward details of a life; if the inner secret of it, the remorse, temptations, true, often-baffled, never-ended struggle of it, be forgotten? "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Of all acts, is not, for a man, *repentance* the most divine? The deadliest sin, I say, were that same supercilious consciousness of no sin;—that is death; the heart so conscious is divorced from sincerity, humility and fact; is dead: it is "pure" as dead dry sand is pure. David's life and history, as written for us in those Psalms of his, I consider to be the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below. All earnest souls will ever discern in it the faithful struggle of an earnest human soul towards what is good and best. Struggle often baffled, sore baffled, down as into entire wreck; yet a struggle never ended; ever, with tears, repentance, true unconquerable purpose, begun anew. Poor human nature! Is not a man's walking, in truth, always that: "a succession of falls"? Man can do no other. In this wild element of a Life, he has to struggle onwards; now fallen, deep-abased; and ever, with tears, repentance, with bleeding heart, he has to rise again, struggle again still onwards. That his struggle be a faithful unconquerable one: that is the question of questions. We will put-up with many sad details,

if the soul of it were true. Details by themselves will never teach us what it is. I believe we misestimate Mahomet's faults even as faults: but the secret of him will never be got by dwelling there. We will leave all this behind us; and assuring ourselves that he did mean some true thing, ask candidly what it was or might be.

THOMAS CARLYLE: *Heroes and Hero Worship.*

## PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

THE service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit is to rouse, to startle it into sharp and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits; for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at

any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own. Philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us. "Philosophy is the microscope of thought." The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.

One of the most beautiful passages in the writings of Rousseau is that in the sixth book of the *Confes-*

sions, where he describes the awakening in him of the literary sense. An undefinable taint of death had always clung about him, and now in early manhood he believed himself smitten by mortal disease. He asked himself how he might make as much as possible of the interval that remained; and he was not biassed by anything in his previous life when he decided that it must be by intellectual excitement, which he found just then in the clear, fresh writings of Voltaire. Well! we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death, but with a sort of indefinite reprieve—*les hommes sont tous condamnés à mort avec des sursis indéfinis*: we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among “the children of this world,” in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art’s sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give noth-

ing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

WALTER PATER: *The Renaissance*. Used by permission of The Macmillan Company.

## THE MEANING OF LITERATURE

LITERATURE, like its most excellent phase, poetry, has never been satisfactorily defined. In essence it is too subtle, too elusive, too vital, to be confined within the limits of phrase. Yet everybody vaguely knows what it is. Everybody knows that human life, in its endless commonplace, unfathomable complexity, impresses human beings in ways which vary not only with individuals, but with the generations and the nations. Somewhere in the oldest English writings there is an allegory which has never faded. Of a night, it tells us, a little group was gathered about the fireside in a hall where the flicker of flame cast light on some and threw others into shadow, but none into shadow so deep as the darkness without. And into the window from the midst of the night flew a swallow lured by the light; but unable by reason of his wildness to linger among men, he sped across the hall and so out again into the dark, and was seen no more. To this day, as much as when the old poet first saw or fancied it, the swallow's flight remains an image of earthly life. From whence we know not, we come into the wavering light and gusty warmth of this world; but here the law of our being forbids that we remain. A little we may see, fancying

that we understand,—the hall, the lords and the servants, the chimney and the feast; more we may feel,—the light and the warmth, the safety and the danger, the hope and the dread. Then we must forth again, into the voiceless, unseen eternities. But the fleeting moments of life, like the swallow's flight once more, are not quite voiceless; as surely as he may twitter in the ears of men, so men themselves may give sign to one another of what they think they know, and of what they know they feel. More too; men have learned to record these signs, so that long after they have departed, others may guess what their life meant. These records are often set forth in terms which may be used only by those of rarely special gift and training,—the terms of architecture and sculpture, of painting and music; but oftener and more freely they are phrased in the terms which all men learn somehow to use,—the terms of language. Some of these records, and most, are of so little moment that they are soon neglected and forgotten; others, like the fancied story of the swallow, linger through the ages. It is to these that we give the name of literature. Literature is the lasting expression in words of the meaning of life.

BARRETT WENDELL: *The Literary History of America*. Used by permission of and arrangement with the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

## POVERTY

“**S**IR,” said Johnson, “all the arguments which are brought to represent poverty as no evil, show it to be evidently a great evil. You never find people labouring to convince you that you may live very happily upon a plentiful fortune.”

He knew what he was talking of, that rugged old master of common sense. Poverty is of course a relative thing. The term has reference, above all, to one’s standing as an intellectual being. If I am to believe the newspapers, there are title-bearing men and women in England, who, had they an assured income of five-and-twenty shillings per week, would have no right to call themselves poor, for their intellectual needs are those of a stable-boy or scullery wench. Give me the same income and I can live, but I am poor indeed.

You tell me that money cannot buy the things most precious. Your commonplace proves that you have never known the lack of it. When I think of all the sorrow and the barrenness that has been wrought in my life by want of a few more pounds per annum than I was able to earn, I stand aghast at money’s significance. What kindly joys have I lost —those simple forms of happiness to which every heart has claim—because of poverty! Meetings with

those I loved made impossible year after year; sadness, misunderstanding, nay, cruel alienation, arising from inability to do the things I wished, and which I might have done had a little money helped me; endless instances of homely pleasure and contentment curtailed or forbidden by narrow means. I have lost friends merely through the constraints of my position; friends I might have made have remained strangers to me; solitude of the bitter kind, the solitude which is enforced at times when mind or heart longs for companionship, often cursed my life solely because I was poor. I think it would scarce be an exaggeration to say that there is no moral good which has not to be paid for in coin of the realm.

“Poverty,” said Johnson again, “is so great an evil, and pregnant with so much temptation, so much misery, that I cannot but earnestly enjoin you to avoid it.”

For my own part, I needed no injunction to that effort of avoidance. Many a London garret knows how I struggled with the unwelcome chamber-fellow. I marvel she did not abide with me to the end. It is a sort of inconsequence in Nature, and sometimes makes me vaguely uneasy through nights of broken sleep.

GEORGE GISSING: *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Used by permission of the publishers, The Modern Library, Inc.

## THE TEMPEST

TO-DAY I have read *The Tempest*. It is perhaps the play that I love best, and, because I seem to myself to know it so well, I commonly pass it over in opening the book. Yet, as always in regard to Shakespeare, having read it once more, I find that my knowledge was less complete than I supposed. So it would be, live as long as one might; so it would ever be, whilst one had strength to turn the pages and a mind left to read them.

I like to believe that this was the poet's last work, that he wrote it in his home at Stratford, walking day by day in the fields which had taught his boyhood to love rural England. It is ripe fruit of the supreme imagination, perfect craft of the master hand. For a man whose life's business it has been to study the English tongue, what joy can equal that of marking the happy ease wherewith Shakespeare surpasses, in mere command of words, every achievement of those even who, apart from him, are great? I could fancy that, in *The Tempest*, he wrought with a peculiar consciousness of this power, smiling as the word of inimitable felicity, the phrase of incomparable cadence, was

whispered to him by the Ariel that was his genius. He seems to sport with language, to amuse himself with new discovery of its resources. From king to beggar, men of every rank and every order of mind have spoken with his lips; he has uttered the lore of fairy-land; now it pleases him to create a being neither man nor fairy, a something between brute and human nature, and to endow its purposes with words. These words, how they smack of the moist and spawning earth, of the life of creatures that cannot rise above the soil! We do not think of it enough; we stint our wonder because we fall short in appreciation. A miracle is worked before us, and we scarce give heed; it has become familiar to our minds as any other of nature's marvels, which we rarely pause to reflect upon. *The Tempest* contains the noblest meditative passage in all the plays; that which embodies Shakespeare's final view of life, and is the inevitable quotation of all who would sum the teachings of philosophy. It contains his most exquisite lyrics, his tenderest love passages, and one glimpse of fairy-land which—I cannot but think—outshines the utmost beauty of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: Prospero's farewell to the "elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves." Again a miracle; these are things which cannot be staled by repetition. Come to them often as you will, they are ever fresh as though new minted from the brain of the poet. Being perfect, they can

never droop under that satiety which arises from the perception of fault; their virtue can never be so entirely savoured as to leave no pungency of gusto for the next approach.

Among the many reasons which make me glad to have been born in England, one of the first is that I read Shakespeare in my mother tongue. If I try to imagine myself as one who cannot know him face to face, who hears him only speaking from afar, and that in accents which only through the labouring intelligence can touch the living soul, there comes upon me a sense of chill discouragement, of dreary deprivation. I am wont to think that I can read Homer, and, assuredly, if any man enjoys him, it is I; but can I for a moment dream that Homer yields me all his music, that his word is to me as to him who walked by the Hellenic shore when Hellas lived? I know that there reaches me across the vast of time no more than a faint and broken echo; I know that it would be fainter still, but for its blending with those memories of youth which are as a glimmer of the world's primeval glory. Let every land have joy of its poet; for the poet is the land itself, all its greatness and its sweetness, all that incommunicable heritage for which men live and die. As I close the book, love and reverence possess me. Whether does my full heart turn to the great Enchanter, or to the Island upon which he has laid his spell? I know not. I can-

not think of them apart. In the love and reverence awakened by that voice of voices, Shakespeare and England are but one.

GEORGE GISSING: *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Used by permission of the publishers,  
The Modern Library, Inc.

## ENGLISH FOOD

ONE has heard much condemnation of the English kitchen. Our typical cook is spoken of as a gross, unimaginative creature, capable only of roasting or seething. Our table is said to be such as would weary or revolt any but gobbet-bolting carnivores. We are told that our bread is the worst in Europe, an indigestible paste; that our vegetables are diet rather for the hungry animal than for discriminative man; that our warm beverages, called coffee and tea, are so carelessly or ignorantly brewed that they preserve no simple virtue of the drink as it is known in other lands. To be sure, there is no lack of evidence to explain such censure. The class which provides our servants is undeniably coarse and stupid, and its handiwork of every kind too often bears the native stamp. For all that, English victuals are, in quality, the best in the world, and English cookery is the wholesomest and the most appetizing known to any temperate clime.

As in so many other of our good points, we have achieved this thing unconsciously. Your ordinary Englishwoman engaged in cooking probably has no

other thought than to make the food masticable; but reflect on the results, when the thing is well done, and there appears a culinary principle. Nothing could be simpler, yet nothing more right and reasonable. The aim of English cooking is so to deal with the raw material of man's nourishment as to bring out, for the healthy palate, all its natural juices and savours. And in this, when the cook has any measure of natural or acquired skill, we most notably succeed. Our beef is veritably beef; at its best, such beef as can be eaten in no other country under the sun; our mutton is mutton in its purest essence—think of a shoulder of South-down at the moment when the first jet of gravy starts under the carving knife! Each of our vegetables yields its separate and characteristic sweetness. It never occurs to us to disguise the genuine flavour of food; if such a process be necessary, then something is wrong with the food itself. Some wise-acre scoffed at us as the people with only one sauce. The fact is, we have as many sauces as we have kinds of meat; each, in the process of cookery, yields its native sap, and this is the best of all sauces conceivable. Only English folk know what is meant by *gravy*; consequently, the English alone are competent to speak on the question of sauce.

To be sure, this culinary principle presupposes food of the finest quality. If your beef and your mutton have flavours scarcely distinguishable, whilst both this

and that might conceivably be veal, you will go to work in quite a different way; your object must then be to disguise, to counterfeit, to add an alien relish—in short, to do anything *except* insist upon the natural quality of the viand. Happily, the English have never been driven to these expedients. Be it flesh, fowl, or fish, each comes to table so distinctly and eminently itself that by no possibility could it be confused with anything else. Give your average cook a bit of cod, and tell her to dress it in her own way. The good creature will carefully boil it, and there an end of the matter; and by no exercise of art could she have so treated the fish as to make more manifest and enjoyable that special savour which heaven has bestowed upon cod. Think of our array of joints; how royal is each in its own way, and how utterly unlike any of the others. Picture a boiled leg of mutton. It is mutton, yes, and mutton of the best; nature has bestowed upon man no sweeter morsel; but the same joint roasted is mutton, too, and how divinely different! The point is that these differences are natural; that, in eliciting them, we obey the eternal law of things, and no human caprice. Your artificial relish is here not only needless, but offensive.

In the case of veal, we demand "stuffing." Yes, for veal is a somewhat insipid meat, and by experience we have discovered the best method of throwing into relief such inherent goodness as it has. The stuffing does

not disguise, nor seek to disguise; it accentuates. Good veal stuffing—reflect!—is in itself a triumph of culinary instinct; so bland it is, and yet so powerful upon the gastric juices.

Did I call veal insipid? I must add that it is only so in comparison with English beef and mutton. When I think of the “brown” on the edge of a really fine cut of veal—!

As so often when my thought has gone forth in praise of things English, I find myself tormented by an afterthought—the reflection that I have praised a time gone by. Now, in this matter of English meat. A newspaper tells me that English beef is non-existent; that the best meat bearing that name has merely been fed up in England for a short time before killing. Well, well; we can only be thankful that the quality is still so good. Real English mutton still exists, I suppose. It would surprise me if any other country could produce the shoulder I had yesterday.

Who knows? Perhaps even our own cookery has seen its best days. It is a lamentable fact that the multitude of English people nowadays never taste roasted meat; what they call by that name is baked in the oven—a totally different thing, though it may, I admit, be inferior only to the right roast. Oh, the sirloin of old times, the sirloin which I can remember, thirty or forty years ago! That was English, and no mistake, and all the history of civilization could show

nothing on the table of mankind to equal it. To clap that joint into a steamy oven would have been a crime unpardonable by gods and man. Have I not with my own eyes seen it turning, turning on the spit? The scent it diffused was in itself a cure for dyspepsia.

It is very long since I tasted a slice of boiled beef; I have a suspicion that the thing is becoming rare. In a household such as mine, the "round" is impracticable; of necessity it must be large, altogether too large for our requirements. But what exquisite memories does my mind preserve! The very colouring of a round, how rich it is, yet how delicate, and how subtly varied! The odour is totally distinct from that of roast beef, and yet it is beef incontestable. Hot, of course with carrots, it is a dish for a king; but cold it is nobler. Oh, the thin broad slice, with just its fringe of consistent fat!

We are sparing of condiments, but such as we use are the best that man has invented. And we know *how* to use them. I have heard an impatient innovator scoff at the English law on the subject of mustard, and demand why, in the nature of things, mustard should not be eaten with mutton. The answer is very simple; this law has been made by the English palate—which is impeccable. I maintain it is impeccable! Your educated Englishman is an infallible guide in all that relates to the table. "The man of superior intellect," said Tennyson—justifying his love of boiled beef

and new potatoes—"knows what is good to eat"; and I would extend it to all civilized natives of our country. We are content with nothing but the finest savours, the truest combinations; our wealth, and happy natural circumstances, have allowed us an education of the palate of which our natural aptitude was worthy. Think, by the by, of those new potatoes, just mentioned. Our cook, when dressing them, puts into the saucepan a sprig of mint. This is genius. Not otherwise could the flavour of the vegetable be so perfectly, yet so delicately emphasized. The mint is there, and we know it; yet our palate knows only the young potato.

GEORGE GISSING: *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*. Used by permission of the publishers,  
The Modern Library, Inc.

## A BIRTHDAY LETTER

*(February 10, 1925)*

YOU understood about human weakness, so you will know how it is that I have left writing for your birthday until this last possible moment. I've been looking over some of your old letters. I don't do so often, it is too troublesome to see how some have misfeatured you. Then last night, about bread-and-cheese time—the *wishing* time of the evening you used to call it, when one rather hankers for some friend to drop in (to get between one's self and Eternity)—I began gaping stupidly into the fire, wondering how to light a candle for your sake. It was a different fire from yours: a fire of logs: wood that might have been made into desks. It was silly of me to sit brooding there, for to you of all men a letter should be the un-studied excess of the mind. But it was the distance between us, as snow was sifting, that chilled my fingers. You have said pleasant things about the difficulties of Distant Correspondence; but no letter was ever addressed you from so far as this. I sat there, empty of everything but angry love. I could not write,

so in your honour I had some hot water with its Better Adjunct, and went to bed.

What can I tell you that would interest you most? There are still Richardsons about (you remember him, the fellow who used to keep you waiting for your holidays? What an uneasy immortality he got himself thereby); and fellows like Rickman, of whom you said that he didn't have to be told a thing twice, are still rare birds. But it is as impossible to be bored on Murray Hill as it was on Fleet Street. Your old anxieties about abstaining from tobacco and liquor would be made more metaphysical here, since the abstention is supposed to be compulsory. You'd be amused, if you knew how you are regarded as a gospel for the young, "studied" in schools, your desperate and special humour conned as a textbook of "whimsicality." Yes, they still label you "the gentle." They have forgotten your letters to S. T. C., imploring him to substitute drunken, shabby, unshaven, cross-eyed, stammering, or any other epithet that rang true in your ear. So endlessly has your "gentleness" been drummed into young ears that there has been, among our more savage juniors, a kind of odd blindness as to the real you. Perhaps they do not know you as you are in your letters. The rest of you, I must confess, it is long since I read. I am not a systematic reader, I love to gather my notions of people from their casual ejaculations rather than where they open themselves

deliberately. So it is in your letters that I have you and hold you. There you have taught us, more than a hundred novelists could do, what love means. It suffers long and is kind. There I see your trouble and weakness so much greater than many others' strength. There I see you laughing at solemn apes; I see your divine silliness and your rich shrewdness. Sometimes, when my self-pitying generation beats its breast, I think of your magnanimous patience. I think of your rockets of absurdity, sent up like sea signals on a dark sky of loneliness. I think of those last days when you and Mary said that the auction posters were your playbills. I think of your great love story—yours and Mary's—perhaps the bravest in the world. Then I wonder whether some of us nowadays should not write an *Apologia pro Vita Sua*—an Apology for living in a Sewer.

You could remember "few specialties in your life," you wrote once for someone (a publisher, perhaps?) who wanted a blurb about you. Except, you added, that you "once caught a swallow flying." Indeed you did: the wild fierce bird of laughter with wet eyes. I think that to have known you when you had been walking arm in arm with Barleycorn and cast no shadow on the pavements of Covent Garden would have been very close to my idea of religion. I smile, as you did, to remember that the Woodbridge Book Club blackballed your volume. There was something

in it—they did not know just what—that was not quite seemly. This implicates me, too, for some of my forbears, I suspect, may have cast a black pellet or so in that matter. I apologize: and neither of us loves them any the less for their genteel simplicity. And indeed that strange fancy of yours, when brightened into flame by understanding intercourse, must have been a lovely and reproachable sight.

We shall receive no letters in the grave, someone said: Doctor Johnson, perhaps. It is just as well, for you would scarcely relish this one. But it had to be written. If there are 150 candles on this cake of yours, they will be put there by the 150 who think of you not as the gentle, but as the tormented, desperate, mad, and tipsy Elia. Still, as you said of the "Ancient Mariner," literature can sting us through sufferings into high pleasure. "I shall never like tripe again." Once you wrote "I never saw a hero; I wonder how they look." Ah, dear Charles, you need not have searched far. Mary could have told you.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY: *The Romany Stain*. Copyright, 1926, by Doubleday, Page and Co. Used by permission of Doubleday, Page and Co.

## POETIC PEOPLE

**A** SIMPLE experiment will distinguish two types of human nature. Gather a throng of people and pour them into a ferry-boat. By the time the boat has swung into the river you will find that a certain proportion have taken the trouble to climb upstairs, in order to be out on deck and see what is to be seen as they cross over. The rest have settled indoors, to think what they will do upon reaching the other side, or perhaps lose themselves in apathy or tobacco smoke. But leaving out those apathetic, or addicted to a single enjoyment, we may divide all the alert passengers on the boat into two classes—those who are interested in crossing the river, and those who are merely interested in getting across. And we may divide all the people on the earth, or all the moods of people, in the same way. Some of them are chiefly occupied with attaining ends, and some with receiving experiences. The distinction of the two will be more marked when we name the first kind practical, and the second poetic, for common knowledge recognizes that a person poetic or in a poetic mood is impractical, and a practical person is intolerant of poetry.

We can see the force of this intolerance, too, and how deeply it is justified, if we make clear to our minds just what it means to be practical, and what a great thing it is. It means to be controlled in your doings by the consideration of ends yet unattained. The practical man is never distracted by things, or aspects of things, which have no bearing on his purpose, but, ever seizing the significant, he moves with a single mind and a single emotion toward the goal. And even when the goal is achieved you will hardly see him pause to rejoice in it; he is already on his way to another achievement. For that is the irony of his nature. His joy is not in any conquest or destination, but his joy is in going toward it. To which joy he adds the pleasure of being praised as a practical man, and a man who will arrive.

In a more usual sense, perhaps, a practical man is a man occupied with attaining certain ends that people consider important. He must stick pretty close to the business of feeding and preserving life. Nourishment and shelter, money-making, maintaining respectability, and if possible a family—these are the things that give its common meaning to the word “practical.” An acute regard for such features of the scenery, and the universe, as contribute or can be made to contribute to these ends, and a systematic neglect of all other features, are the traits of mind which this word popularly suggests. And it is because of the

vital importance of these things to almost all people that the word "practical" is a eulogy, and is able to be so scornful of the word "poetic."

"It is an earnest thing to be alive in this world. With competition, with war, with disease and poverty and oppression, misfortune and death oncoming, who but fools will give serious attention to what is not significant to the business?"

"Yes—but what is the *use* of being alive in the world, if life is so oppressive in its moral character that we must always be busy getting somewhere, and never simply realizing where we are? What were the value of your eternal achieving, if we were not here on our holiday to appreciate, among other things, some of the things you have achieved?"

Thus, if we could discover a purely poetic and a purely practical person, might they reason together. But we can discover nothing so satisfactory to our definitions, and therefore let us conclude the discussion of the difference between them. It has led us to our own end—a clearer understanding of the nature of poetic people, and of all people when they are in a poetic mood. They are lovers of the qualities of things. They are not engaged, as the learned say that all life is, in becoming adjusted to an environment, but they are engaged in becoming acquainted with it. They are possessed by the impulse to realize, an impulse as deep, and arbitrary, and unexplained as that

“will to live” which lies at the bottom of all explanations. It seems but the manifestation, indeed, of that will itself in a concrete and positive form. It is a wish to experience life and the world. That is the essence of the poetic temper.

Children are poetic. They love to feel of things. I suppose it is necessary to their preservation that they should be, for by random exercise of their organs of feeling they develop them and make them fit for their practical function. But that is not the chief reason why they are poetic; the chief reason is that they are not practical. They have not yet felt the necessity, or got addicted to the trick, of formulating a purpose and then achieving it. Therefore this naïve impulse of nature, the impulse toward realization, is free in them. Moreover, it is easy of satisfaction. It is easy for children to taste the qualities of experience, because experience is new, and its qualities are but loosely bound together into what we call “things.” Each is concrete, particular, unique, and without an habitual use.

Babies have no thought, we may say, but to feel after and find the world, bringing it so far as possible to their mouths, where it becomes poignant. They become absorbed in friendship with the water they bathe in. The crumple noise of paper puts them in ecstasy, and later all smells and sounds, brightness, and color, and form, and motion, delight them. We can

see them discover light by putting their hands before their eyes and taking them away quickly, and again, at a later age, discover sound by stopping their ears and opening them again.

Who does not remember in his own childhood testing the flavors of things—of words, perhaps saying them over and over until he had defeated his own wish, for they become pulpy and ridiculous in his mouth? Anything which invades the sense like cinnamon, or sorrel, or neat flowers, or birds' eggs, or a nut, or a horn, is an object of peculiar affection. It is customary in books about children to say that they care little for the actual qualities of an object, and are able to deal with it as though it were anything that they choose to imagine. But I think only the positive part of this statement is true. Undoubtedly their imaginations are active in more various directions, and they draw the distinction between the real and the ideal in perception less clearly than grown-up people do. But the most pronounced characteristic of children is that they are perfectly free to feel the intrinsic qualities of things as they merely are. What we call objects are for the most part practically determined co-ordinations of qualities. And what we call the *actual* quality of an object, is usually the quality which indicates its vital use. When we say actual, therefore, we really mean practical. But so far as actuality from the stand-point of the things is concerned, the children come

nearer to it, and care more about it, than we do. To us a derby hat is for covering the head, and that is about all it is; but to them it is hard, smooth, hollow, deep, funny, and may be named after the mixing-bowl and employed accordingly. And so it is with all things. The child loves a gem with its pure and serene ray, as the poet loves it, for its own sake.

Nor is it only such qualities as may be said to give pleasure that he seeks, unless pleasure be defined as seeking, for he wants all experience. He wants all that he can stand. He is exploring the whole world of sense, and not rarely upsets his stomach, and his entire system, in a zest for the reception of sensations that are instinctively abhorred. Two children of our neighborhood will wear to their graves the brand of a red-hot scarf-pin as a testimony to that first love of experience. They did not want torture, I suppose, but they wanted to see what it is to be tortured. And so it was in varying degrees with us all. It seems to me, when I look back, as if we were forever out behind the barn finding out what something or other was "like."

It has been a vast problem for those concerned with æsthetic and other theories, why people love tragedy when they are not in it. But if their theories would only allow that these organisms of ours, which have been gnashing and struggling together God knows what billions of years for a chance to live, have really

an interest in living, there could be no problem. The problem is, seeing this wild zest for life, and life so tragic—the problem is, why people do not love tragedy when they are in it. And in truth they do. From the pure sweetness of every romantic sorrow to the last bitter comfort of an old man bereft, who mutters to his soul, "This is a part of the full experience of a man!"—from first to last, up to the cannon's mouth and down to the midnight grave, the poetic impulse survives. We love to taste life to the full.

In energetic but idle hours it survives joyfully. And in youth these were the predominant hours. At all times we were ready for exuberant realization. We were not indifferent to the morning. We did not wake at the greeting of a last night's proposition in commerce or knowledge, but at the smile of the sun. The stuff of our thoughts was not sentences and numbers, but grass and apples and brown honey. Such excellent objects parading before our minds in a thousand combinations and colors left us no time to develop these general conclusions with which we are now filled. We could not banish our prairie thoughts from the school-room, though they liked it as little as we, and the hour of recess was the hour of life. And in the hours of life how greedy we were! Every sense was open with indiscriminate material flowing in. Our eyes trained for every seeing, our ears catching the first

murmur of a new experience, we ran after the world in our eagerness, not to learn about it, but to taste the flavor of its being.

Oh, the wild joys of living! the leaping from rock up to rock,  
The strong rending of boughs from the fir-tree, the cool silver shock  
Of the plunge in a pool's living water, the hunt of the bear,  
And the sultriness showing the lion is couched in his lair.  
And the meal, the rich dates yellowed over with gold dust divine,  
And the locust-flesh steeped in the pitcher, the full draught of wine,  
And the sleep in the dried river-channel where bulrushes tell  
That the water was wont to go warbling so softly and well.  
How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ  
All the heart and the soul and the senses for ever in joy!

This agility and fervor of realization extends early to the exercise of all the senses. And then as we grow a little older it comes inward, and we tremble to catch our own emotions on the wing. Fear, for instance, is a being of intense fascination, and even so impelling a power as the instinct of self-preservation is suspended by the poetic impulse—suspended in order that its own very nature may be experienced in feeling. Can you not remember the keen edge of a venture into the

barn-yard, a tumultuous dash across the corn-crib which offered a refuge impregnable to those mild-mannered cows? Anger is a moderate pleasure to most healthy persons, but in youth it is a thing to thirst after and brag of. It is life itself. Mulishness is an engaging state of being. Cruelty and mercy have often the same original charm.

I remember discovering insolence with exactly the same happy spirit of gratification with which I see babies discover light. I was profoundly interested in Nancy Hanks, who had broken the world's record by trotting a mile in 2.04. I believe that I *was* Nancy Hanks most of the time, and anybody who wanted to converse with me or put me in good-humor would begin upon that topic. But at last I became aware that I could do something quite different from being gratified by all their talk, and I was carried away by the discovery. My opportunity came during supper, at the gracious hands of a maiden aunt:

“Do you know who Nancy Hanks was named after?”

“No,” I shouted, “I don't know and I don't care a *darn*—see?”

My memory of the punishment which followed, and how I became aware that there are limits to profitable exploration in such fields, is dim, but of the excited pleasure of the adventure, and my underlying friendliness toward the old lady throughout, I am

quite certain. They are great days when we first discern these powerful creatures in us, unnamed and meaningless monsters to challenge forth. Ghost-terror, and dizziness, and sickness at the sight of blood, are among them. Imagine the mind of a young man who knows that there lies a pile of corpses the other side of a smouldering factory wall, and he both hastens to them and flees away from them, until finally this lust after the intense conquers, and he goes and gazes his fill. Do not call that morbid, but an act of exuberant vitality. For there is high-spiritedness in those that are young, not for sensation only, but for emotion. And this too they carry with them, some more and some less, throughout life. Rancor and magnanimity, lust and romance, rapture and even melancholy—drink them to the dregs, for they are what it is to be.

No, no! go not to Lethe—

It is not only things of the sense and body that a child loves for their own sake, but at a certain age he learns to watch with wonder the paintings of his mind. When he is condemned into his crib, and has to face the loss of the whole lovely world in sleep, then this is the last resource. As long as God lets him he will devote his somnolescent power to sensuous memory or anticipation, or just the circus-antics of grotesque and vivid-colored creatures that dance in before

him unbidden, uncreated, unexplained. Even if sometimes he does honestly try to think, he finds that he cannot very long cling to the meaning of his thought, because he is all curious to examine those garments of imagery that it wears.

To most adults, I suppose, it is a bare mechanical or rational process to count from one to a hundred; but to an alert child it hardly ever is. It is a winding and bending over a plain, over a prairie, a slow climb, a drip-drip, or an odd march of marionettes, or perhaps it is just the queer sound of the words at his ear. At any rate, the engrossing thing is to estimate the unique character of the process and of each member in it. Eight is a jolly fat man. Six is sitting down. Some people say that they never had any of these pleasures, that they have no mind's eye at all. They cannot see six sit down. Let them try to comfort themselves with the idea that they are more scientific than the rest, not having vivid images to confuse their meanings in the serious business of reaching a conclusion. They are like the people on the ferry-boat who stay downstairs where there are few distractions and they can be perfectly sure to get across. Luckier than they are the people who can enjoy the scenery of speculation, who bring with them out of childhood a clear and spirited fancy.

—Great God! I'd rather be  
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

The final appearance of the poetic impulse, its intellectual appearance is also at its height in youth. It is well known that at a certain period, if they are healthy and have a little self-dependence, young persons fall in love with all kinds of unusual ideas. They come forward with an amazing belief, a wise or foolish theory, which they attach to for its own sake, and not out of regard for its practical or real consequence. They take a taste of Atheism, Anarchism, Asceticism, Hindoo Philosophy, Pessimism, Christianity, or anything that offers a good flavor of radical faith. This is only the same zest for experience. And it will need but a glance at life and literature to prove that such attachment to ideas, with small regard for their meaning in conduct, is not confined to the young. It is a poetic pleasure that people bring with them perhaps farther than any of the others. For most of these pleasures, and especially the more simple and innocent, they soon leave behind, as though it were somehow unworthy to be childlike and love things for their own sake.

We have a superstition prevailing in our homes that the first thing to do upon the appearance of a child, is to bring it up. And we see children brought up in the

utmost haste by persons who have purchased their own maturity at a cost of all native and fresh joy in anything available. But could we only realize how far the youthful pleasure in every poignant realization is above the accidents of fortune, we should take as great pains to preserve that, as to erect the man in our offspring. We should ourselves long to be born again, and maintain for the future a more equitable union of the practical and poetic in our character.

That such a union is attainable, the lives of the greatest show. It is possible to keep throughout a life not wholly disordered, or idle, or cast loose from the general drift of achievement, a spirit fresh to the world. The thought brings us back to *Æschylus*, a man of heroic proportions, who achieved, in an age of turmoil and war, a life filled wonderfully with realizations that were final, the fruit of evolution, and yet not wanting the excellence of great action directed toward a further end. With the participation of that poetic hero in the campaign of defence against the Persians, and in the battles of Salamis and Marathon, it seems as if Nature had indeed achieved her aim. There experience was at its height, but purpose was unshaken. The little library and piazza poets and esteemers of poetry in these days of art, will do well to remember the great Greek, who died the most renowned literary genius of his age but had carved upon his proud tomb only this boast, that "The

grove of Marathon could bear witness to his good soldierhood, and the long-haired Mede who felt it."

It would be foolish indeed to question whether or not the poetic are capable of purposeful achievement, and the practical capable of intense experience, for we are all, except those lost in apathy, in some degree both poetic and practical. But the example of the hero proves that it is possible for a man, who can think clearly and command the differences that lie within him, to be both poetic and practical in a high degree.

If we could but free our minds from a contamination with certain modern people who teach themselves that they are presided over by a pretty demon called an Artistic Temperament, we should not only cease cherishing by suggestion the tickle-brain condition into which they decay, but we should have for ourselves a sounder estimate of the place and dignity of the poetic. It is not an attribute of special, exotic, or disordered types, but a universal quality of our nature. No live man is without an arbitrary passion for some experience. Indeed, the defect of many of those most scornful of poetry is not that they are strong in the practical life, but that the attachment to some single state of being has got the better of them. There are fifty thousand morphine-takers in Paris, and all over the face of the earth how many million chewers, and breathers, and swallowers of what, far from being of practical value, is both costly and deleterious, bear-

ing unconscious witness to the poetry of human nature.

The greatly poetic differ from them only in the healthy variety of their lives, prevailing everywhere and always. They are those who live variously as well as vividly in the present. This alone distinguishes them from the millions. This alone distinguishes them from all those excluded by our experiment at the beginning, who confine their enjoyment to smoke while they are crossing the river. They are not without realization. But it is only the childlike and the poetic who make the innumerable intimate acquaintances that are to be made, who welcome all living qualities and perfect them, and finally, perhaps, in a supreme moment of morning sunshine and mist over the city, realize what we may call the essence of crossing a ferry. Their breast thrills, and their eyes drink with rapture the million moving and dancing details of that pageant of life—

“—the white sails of schooners and sloops,—the ships at anchor,

The sailors at work in the rigging, or out astride the spars,  
The round masts, the swinging motion of the hulls, the  
slender serpentine pennants,

The large and small steamers in motion, the pilots in  
their pilot-houses,

The white wake left by the passage, the quick tremulous  
whirl of the wheels,

The flags of all nations, the falling of them at sunset,  
The scallop-edged waves in the twilight, the ladled cups,  
    the frolicsome crests and glistening,  
The stretch afar growing dimmer and dimmer, the gray  
    walls of the granite storehouses by the docks,  
On the river the shadowy group, the big steam-tug closely  
    flank'd on each side by the barges—the hay-boat, the  
belated lighter,  
On the neighboring shore, the fires from the foundry  
    chimneys burning high and glaring into the night,  
Casting their flicker of black, contrasted with wild red  
    and yellow light, over the tops of houses, and down  
into the clefts of streets.

MAX EASTMAN: *The Enjoyment of Poetry*. Used by permission of  
and arrangement with the publishers, Charles Scribner's Sons.

“It is the business of a university to train the mind to think and to impart solid knowledge, not to turn out nimble penmen who may earn a living as the clerks and salesmen of literature.”—FREDERIC HARRISON.













